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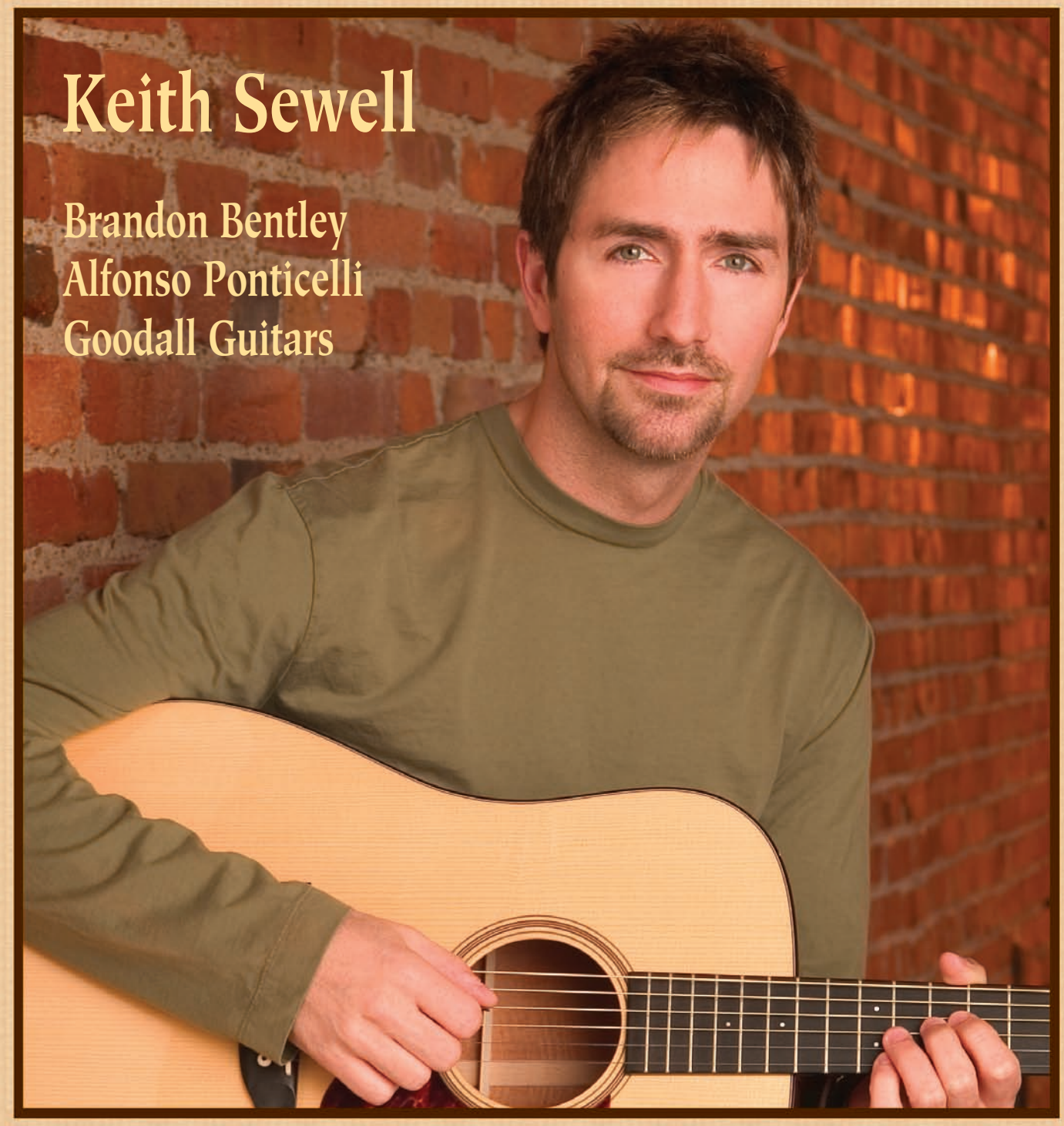

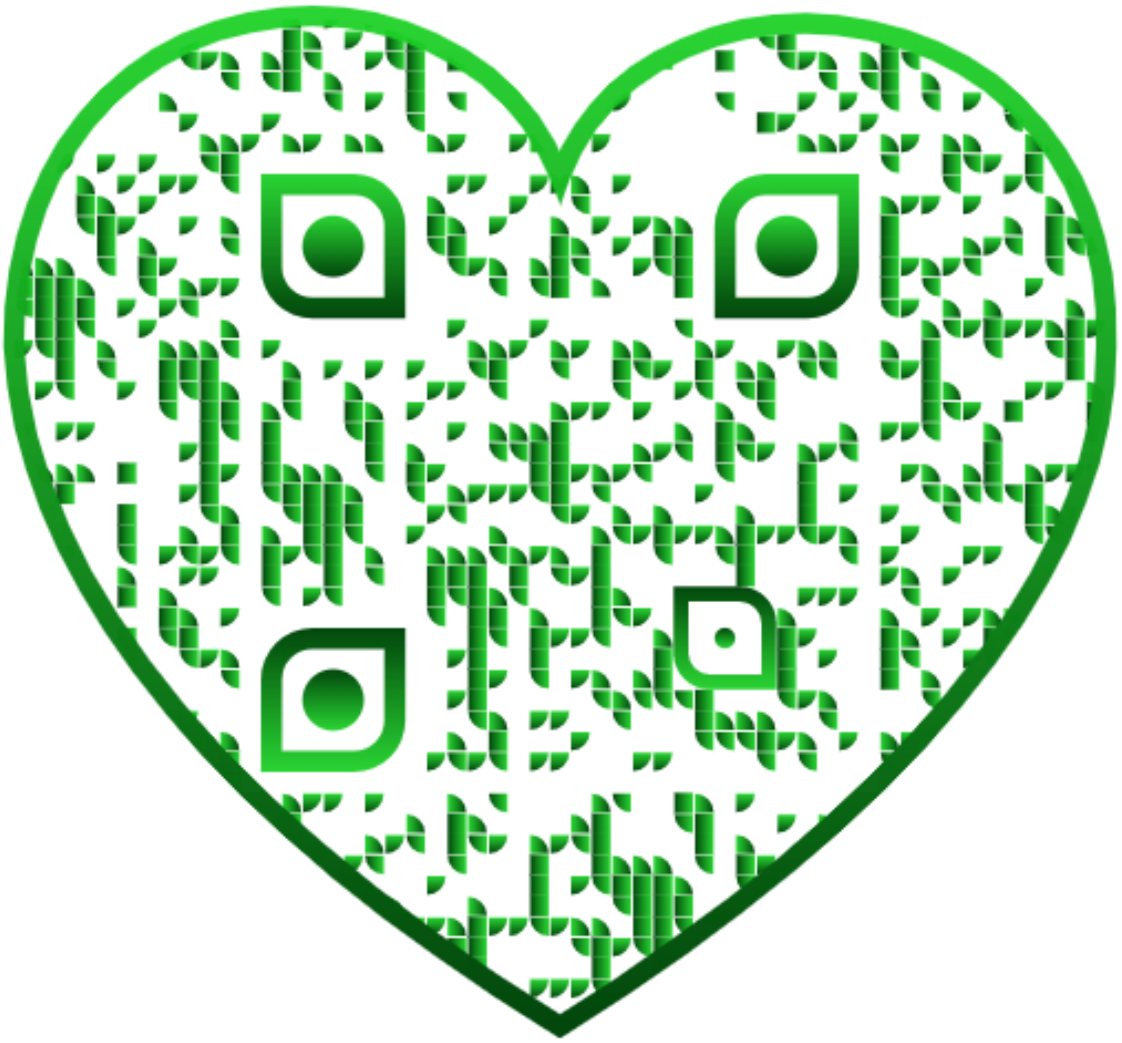

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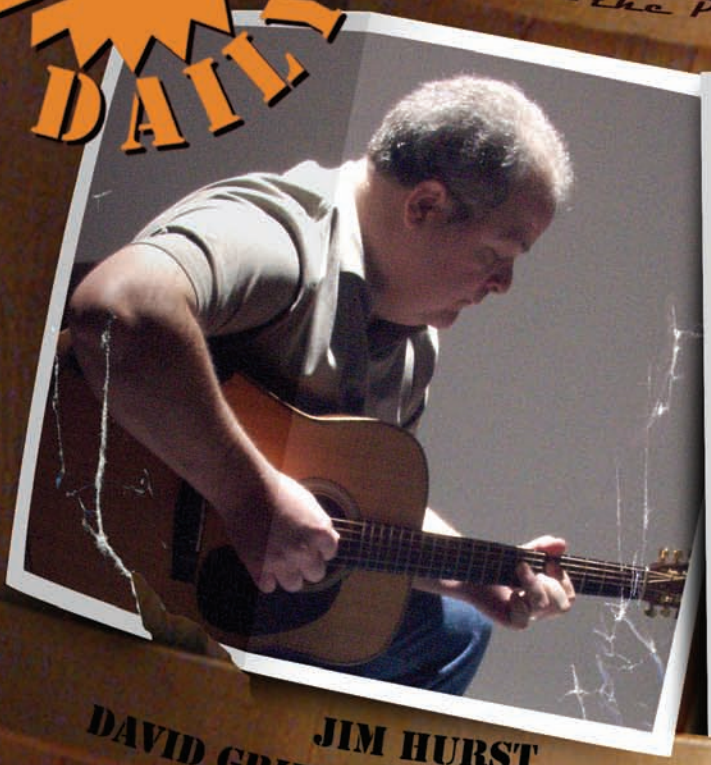

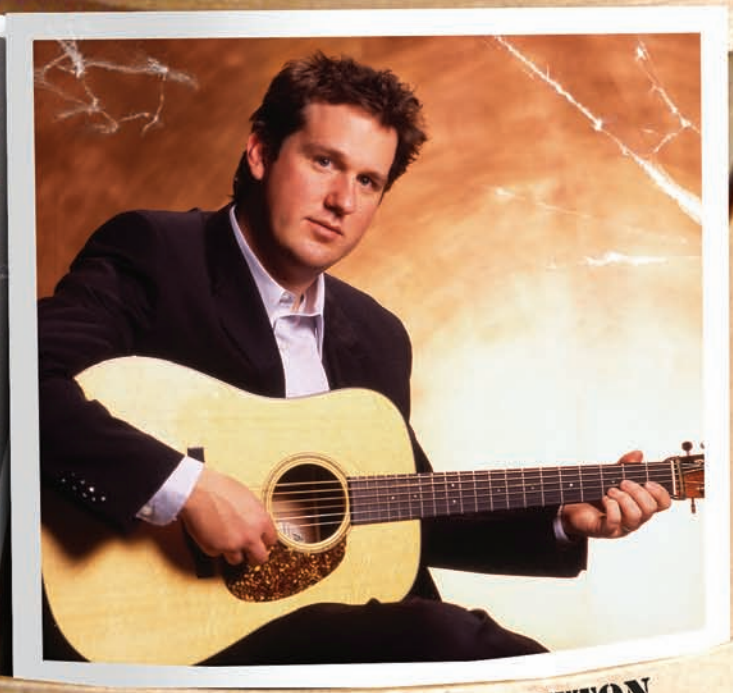

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How to Duplicate & Promote an Acoustic CD Release

1. **Send your music to radio.** No matter how you define your goals, you need to get your music to folk radio. One excellent way to do this is through a **radio-oriented sampler CD program**, such as the OASISACOUSTIC™ sampler CDs, which get the music of Oasis clients to hundreds of key radio stations throughout the U.S.

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3. **Think "retail-friendly" when packaging your CD.** Your CD needs to look as good as it sounds. While jewel-box packaging is still very popular, as an alternative you may want to consider eye-catching **cardboard substitutes for the jewel box.** such as the patented **Oasis Jewel-Free™ Box**.

4. **Work with a reputable duplication company:**

• **Ask for references.** Who are the company's clients? Do they include artists and labels you respect? (Oasis is proud of our work, for example, with Trout Fishing in America, David Wilcox, Trapezoid, Chris Smither, Brooks Williams, Steven King, Salamander Crossing...)

• **Do they understand your music and your market?** If you're going to Kerrville for the first time, do they understand what this means? If your guitar sounds too tinny, do they know how to fix it? Nerissa Nields (The Nields) says "We love dealing with a company that knows and cares who we are. Oasis is fantastic; they manufactured our CDs in time to make sure we had them for our CD release at the Iron Horse. And the quality is superb."

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EDITOR'S PAGE

Songs for Sophie: A Collings Collective

One of the greatest things about being involved with acoustic music and bluegrass is the people. If you are a picker and you show up at a festival, folks welcome you in as if you are family. And once those relationships are formed (you pick for a while), they really are like family. There are so many people across the country who I only see once a year at a certain festival, yet they are some of the best friends I've got. Its the music that makes that happen. As Dan Crary wrote in his column a few issues back, this music can cross boundaries and bring people together like nothing else. All of the people who I've dealt with in the bluegrass business are the same way. The artists, the builders, the promoters, the manufactures...if they are involved in bluegrass music, they are usually very easy to deal with and very friendly folks.

One of the nicest guys I have met since I began publishing this magazine, nearly ten years ago, is Steve McCreary from Collings. Steve is the business manager at Collings Guitars and I've probably run into him once or twice a year at some festival or guitar event since the first time I met him at the Collings factory back in 1996. He is one of those guys who I don't see that often, don't talk to that often, but still consider him a good friend. It is like that with music folks.

A result of the close bond that people in bluegrass have with each other is their willingness to help others in times of need. We have seen this time and time again when bluegrass folks become ill or are down on their luck, the community chips in with benefit concerts, raffles, etc. in order to help out. It is a wonderful thing.

About a year ago when I found out that Steve McCreary's daughter Sophie had to be placed into a care facility as a result of her being diagnosed with early-onset bipolar disorder (a facility that is costing Steve a lot of money). I felt like I wanted to do something that would help out. Others were helping by holding benefit concerts, giving generous donations, or raffling Collings guitars in an effort to help Steve. Typical of bluegrass folks, people were doing whatever they could for Steve and his family. I wanted to be a part of that and so I called Steve with an idea I had about a benefit CD project.

The idea was to gather together artists who play Collings instruments and ask them to donate one track to the CD. Steve thought it was a good idea and so I went forward with it. It was no surprise to me that every single person I contacted was willing to "do anything to help Steve." And the songs they each submitted are incredible. The result is a new FGM Records release called *Songs for Sophie: A Collings Collective* (see the ad on the next page). It is a wonderful CD that I'd like to encourage everyone to buy. If you purchase this CD, you will not only be getting some incredible music, you will be helping one of the nicest guys I know. All of the artists involved with this project donated their time and effort and all of the proceeds go directly to Steve and his family. Thanks for your support!

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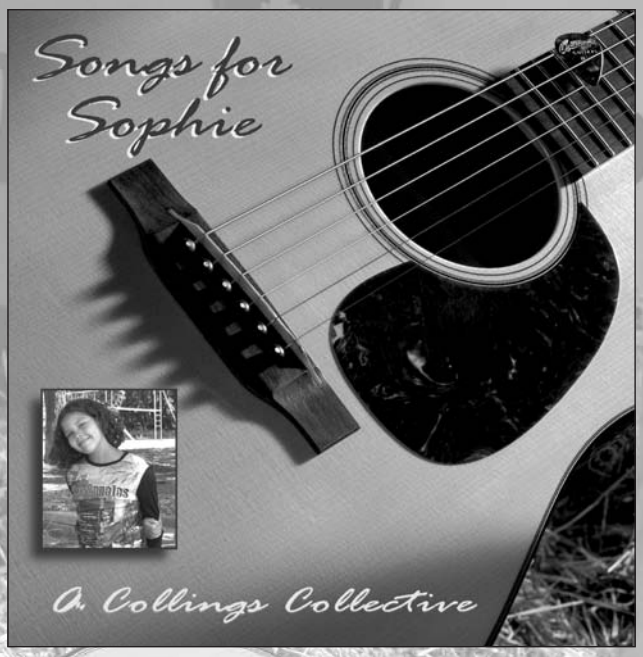

Songs for Sophie: A Collings Collective is a special recording project whereby some of the most talented musicians in acoustic music have volunteered their time and talent to help a very special girl, Sophie McCreary, and her family. Sophie is currently ten years old and has early onset bipolar disorder. [For more information about Sophie, please visit: http://www.anm.com/sophie/.] Sophie's dad, Steve McCreary, is the general manager of Collings Guitars, Inc. of Austin, Texas.

All of the musicians who have contributed to this project own and play Collings instruments and used those instruments—guitars and mandolins—on this recording. Each musician eagerly contributed to this project (without pay), not only because it was to benefit a good cause, but because of the love they have for their Collings instruments and the company that makes them.

When you gather together some of the world's best musicians, playing some of the world's finest acoustic instruments, and they play from their heart to support a great cause, the result is nothing short of musical magic. All proceeds from this recording go directly to help offset the high costs of Sophie's care. By purchasing this CD, you are helping a wonderful family who is an integral part of the larger musical family to which we all belong. If you feel inspired to lend more help to Sophie, please visit the above mentioned website and navigate to the "What To Do" page.

Song & Artist List:

1. **Sophie** Brad Davis
2. **Burdock Root** Matthew Arcara
3. **Guardian Angels** Keith Sewell
4. **In His Eyes** Kenny & Amanda Smith
5. **Good Medicine** Mark Cosgrove
6. **Missing You** Chris Hillman & Herb Pederson
7. **The Geese in the Bog** Tim O'Brien
8. **You've Got So Much Love** Jim Lauderdale
9. **Late At Night** Dan Miller & Brad Davis
10. **Whispering Hope** Rich Brotherton
11. **Old Bud** Cody Kilby
12. **Tous Les Deux** David Doucet & Scott Fore
13. **McCreary's March** Steve Kaufman
14. **Complementary Pillow** James Nash
15. **Around the House** Chris Newman

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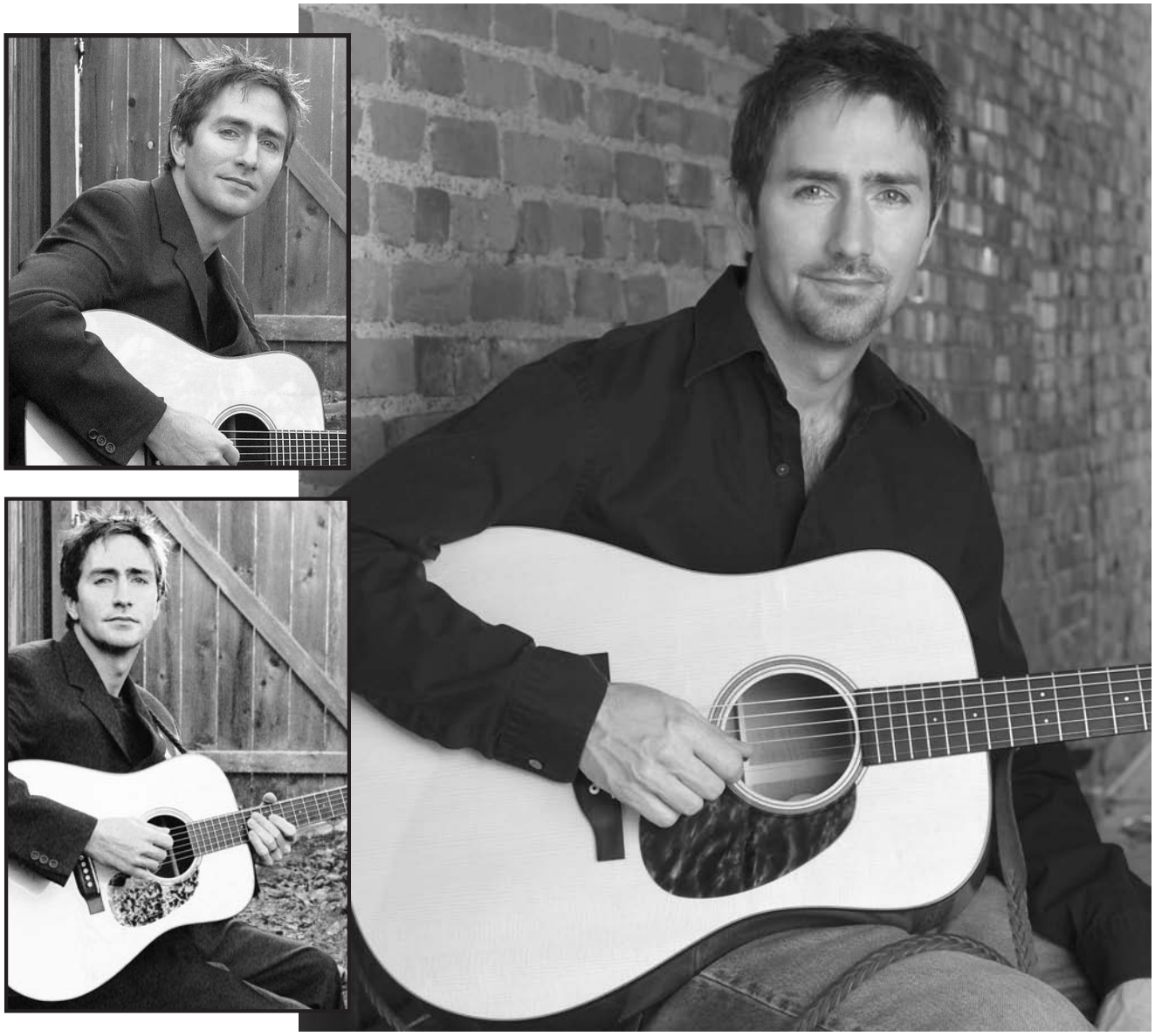


Keith Sewell

About five years ago when I was interviewing Marty Stuart for *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*, Marty told me, "If country music does have any future with pickers, bluegrass is where they are going to get them. If you think about it, the most credible players in country music right now came out of bluegrass." Undoubtedly, one of the "credible players" Marty was talking about was Dallas, Texas, native Keith Sewell. Although he is only 33 years of age, Keith has already had quite a distinguished country music career. He performed with Ricky Skaggs' country band for seven years and has also toured with Marty Stuart and the Dixie Chicks. Additionally, he has written songs that have been recorded by several major country artists. However, like many guitar players before him (Brad Davis, Jim Hurst, and Robert Bowlin to name a few) Keith has recently come back to acoustic music and bluegrass as he is now playing lead acoustic guitar for both Jerry Douglas' band and the Sam Bush Band. Additionally, Skaggs Family Records will soon release Keith's new acoustic-oriented solo CD. This is great news for bluegrass and flatpick guitar fans!

Keith Sewell grew up surrounded by bluegrass. His grandfather was a bluegrass fiddle player for a Texas band called the Shady Grove Ramblers. Keith said, "They worked the whole Texas/Oklahoma bluegrass scene and I got into it because we used to follow him around and watch him play. I came from the same pool as Jon Randall and Brad Davis down there in Texas. I remember seeing those guys at festivals all over Texas and Oklahoma."

Following in his grandfather's footsteps, the first instrument Keith learned to play was the fiddle. "I started at the Suzuki institute in Dallas with a 1/16th size fiddle when I was three years old," he recalled, "But then I started taking private lessons from Texas fiddler Johnny Thorn when I was five." But Keith didn't stay with the fiddle for long. He continues, "When I was about seven or eight I saw Buddy King, Alan Munde, and Eddie

Written by Dan Miller

Shelton and watched them play banjo. I just fell in love with the banjo. I thought, 'Man, that is the greatest thing ever.' So I started taking banjo lessons from Kevin Kirkpatrick when I was about seven. Eventually that evolved into playing guitar when I was about ten or eleven." When asked if there was a defining moment that inspired him to pick up bluegrass guitar, Keith said, "I guess it was when I heard Tony Rice, although I like Doc's playing a lot too."

As a young kid growing up around bluegrass, another one of Keith's favorite pickers was Ricky Skaggs. He said, "I'd heard Ricky play with Boone Creek and the New South, so I knew about him. I wasn't really a country music fan until I heard Ricky's *Highways and Heartaches*. He started coming out with these country records with guys like Ray Flacke and Albert Lee when I was a teenager. I listened to that and was like 'Wow, electric guitar!' So I kind of evolved into learning all of that stuff." During his teenage years Keith spent time playing electric guitar, acoustic guitar, mandolin, and banjo equally.

After graduating from high school, Keith got a job playing with a country band in Dallas called The Shoppe. About six months later the band opened up a show for Ricky Skaggs' band in Enumclaw, WA. Keith said, "At the show I got to meet some of the guys in Ricky's band. Some of them had come out of the same bluegrass scene that I was from in Texas and they actually remembered me from when I was a little tot. Billy Joe Foster was Ricky's utility guy at the time and he was getting ready to leave the band. He played banjo, mandolin, fiddle, guitar, and sang harmony. A couple weeks after we had opened for Ricky he gave me a call and said, 'I need a guy and I want you to come up and audition.' I was overwhelmed, but I auditioned and got the job." That was in 1990.

One of the fondest memories from Keith's career to date came during the first week he was with the Skaggs band. He recalls, "I had just joined the band and was in a dream world. Ricky called everybody and said, 'We are going to play the Opry Friday night.' I thought, 'Wow man, this is awesome.' We were playing 'Uncle Pen' and I was playing the five-string banjo and singing the low harmony. When we go into the 'Jenny Lynne' part on the very end of the song Bill Monroe came out buck dancing. He came out with his mandolin cutting the rug and right before the last chorus he came over to the closest mic, which happened to be mine. My mom was in the audience taking photos and so I got a picture of me and Monroe singing into the same mic at the Grand Ole Opry."

When he first joined the Skaggs band Keith was playing acoustic guitar, banjo, mandolin, and singing harmony. Later Jim Soldey, Ricky's electric guitar player, left the band and Keith moved over to the electric guitar spot. The guy who was eventually hired to fill Keith's spot as the "utility guy" was Bryan Sutton. When Keith left the band in 1997, Bryan Sutton moved into the guitar spot.

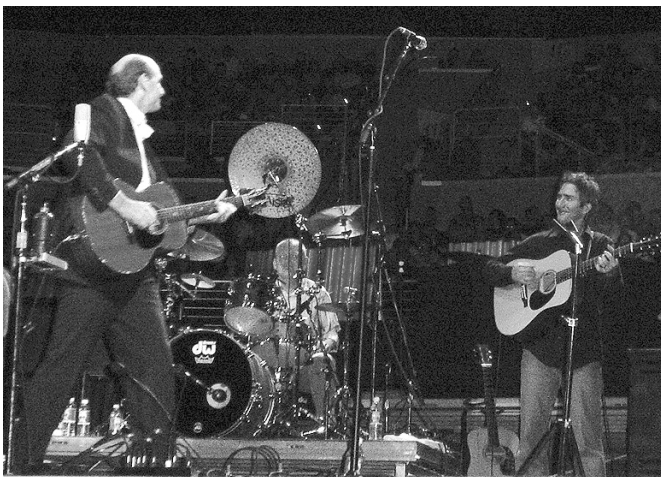
Keith stayed with Ricky Skaggs' band for a total of seven consecutive years with the exception of one short stint where he left the band to play with Marty Stuart for two tours in about 1994. Brad Davis had left Marty's band to tour with Sweethearts of the Rodeo. Keith left Ricky to tour with Marty and Joe Manual, who had been playing with Merle Haggard, left Haggard to tour with Ricky. Keith felt like Marty's band wasn't as good a fit for him as the Ricky Skaggs job was, and at about the same time Joe Manual was feeling that same way about the job with Ricky. As a result Keith left Marty to go back with Ricky and Manual left Ricky to go back with Haggard. To make the circle of transitions complete, Brad Davis left the Sweethearts of the Rodeo and went back with Marty Stuart. Keith said, "It was very strange how it all pieced together."

The two tours that Keith played with Marty included the "Love and Luck" tour and the "Great American" tour in Europe. Regarding that tour, Keith said, "The Great American tour included Emmylou Harris and the Hot Band reunion. That was great for me because Albert Lee was on that tour and I got to have breakfast with him every morning. Every time I'd go in there to breakfast he was sitting by himself and he'd say, 'Come on over here and have a seat.' That just blew my mind because Ricky, Tony Rice, Doc Watson, and Albert Lee were the guys that were 'the' guitar players for me. It is amazing that I've had a chance to get to know them and play with them."

Keith left Skaggs in 1997 after being signed to a record deal with Universal records. He wanted to spend his time concentrating on writing songs for that project. His record was produced by Emory Gordy Jr. and was near completion when it fell victim to another Nashville label closure. He did, however, do quite well with the writing. Ricky Skaggs has recorded several of Keith's songs, including the title cut to Ricky's new CD *Brand New Strings*. Keith has had about 20 songs recorded by country artists such as Steve Wariner, Montgomery Gentry, BR549, and John Michael Montgomery.

After spending about five years writing songs and doing session work Keith went on tour (in 2002) with the Dixie Chicks. Keith said, "Bryan Sutton and I are friends; we have always been real close. He had just done this record with the Dixie Chicks called

Keith Sewell with Bill Monroe at the Grand Ole Opry



Keith Sewell on tour with the Dixie Chicks and James Taylor

Home. He was not going to be able to do the shows and they needed a replacement. He called me and I was able to step in and do it. Then I ended up getting hired for the big tour that they did in 2003." During that tour Keith had the opportunity to perform on the Dixie Chicks' live CD and DVD. Additionally, the tour included shows with James Taylor. James and the Dixie Chicks shared the same band and thus Keith had the opportunity to play with James Taylor as well. He said, "James was really great to work with."

After the Dixie Chicks tour, Keith was hired to go out on the road with Jerry Douglas' band and he also played on Jerry's soon-to-be-released CD. After playing for years in country bands where the solos on each song are fairly short, Keith said that going out with Jerry was originally quite a stretch for him. He recalls, "Barring a few songs with Ricky, most of the solos were organized and structured. Your job was to fit as many notes as you could in this 15-second space, then you were done. It was the same thing with the Chicks. When I started playing with Jerry it was a wake-up call because there are no vocals at all and Jerry had this large following of people that would come out to the music hall and you could hear a pin drop during the song. They are listening to every note. Then Jerry gives you a solo that is basically open-ended. The length of the solo all depends on your dynamics and where you take the solo. I had to learn really fast that there is an art to building solos in that situation. You have to build it up, have a climax, and then bring it back down. At that point it's not about how many notes you play at all. It is about how you play the notes and how you craft the solo. Jerry and Sam are both masters at it. It is something that I am still learning and it is a lot of fun. With every solo they are giving you an empty canvas and they are saying, 'Here, draw a picture.' It has been a lot of fun, and a great learning experience."

When asked about the rhythmic challenges involved in playing in Jerry's band, Keith said, "Since Jerry's stuff is all instrumental and since he is playing most of the lead parts, it really puts a lot of emphasis on rhythm playing. I knew that going in, so when I first got the job I thought to myself, 'The soloing is going to come, but that is not the most important thing. I am backing the best Dobro player that has ever lived and so the main thing for me is to make sure my rhythm chops are there and that I am giving him a good base.' If he doesn't feel comfortable when he is playing, then I am not going to have this job very long. Going into that I decided that I was going to focus a lot on rhythm. It is all about feeling what the band is going to do."

Recalling his first show with Jerry's band, Keith said, "The first show I played with Jerry was in Aspen. I had been working with Jerry's recordings and I remember asking Derek Jones (Jerry's bass player) before the show some specific details about some of the songs. Derek said, 'Well, sometimes it does this, but then other times it does this. But man, don't worry about it. Go up there and feel it and have fun and we'll get there.' I thought, 'How can you say that! That's nuts.' But sure enough we went up there and just playing with Jerry has a way of making you feel comfortable. As intimidating as his playing is, he is probably the least intimidating person that there is: he just said, 'Let's just go up there and feel it.' For me that was a stretch because I had always been with people who said, 'This is the way we are going to do it.' It is really cool."

Keith continued, "Shortly after I got the job I was talking to Bryan Sutton on the phone and he said, 'Well, how are you doing?' I said, 'I am just trying to work on my rhythm.' He said, 'You are a wise man,' because he knows that too. A lot of people focus on Bryan's lead playing, and there is no question, he is a firecracker, but his rhythm playing is over-looked, he's amazing. The same goes with Rice. I believe that the more you work on your rhythm, it can't help but improve your timing and your lead playing. If you can't play rhythm and you can't play in the pocket, then how can you expect to play lead? I'm sure there are a lot of players with hot licks for days that you never hear about because their rhythm is weak and they can't play in bands. To me, laying it in there and making other players feel comfortable is the number one thing."

At the end of 2004 Jerry called Keith and told him that for the majority of 2005 he was going to be on the road with Alison Krauss and thus the band was not going to be very busy. Jerry told Keith that Brad Davis was leaving Sam Bush's band and that he felt like Keith would be perfect for that job. Keith said, "Sam ended up calling me and we got together, picked a little bit, and he asked me to join the band. I was so humbled to get that call because Sam is another all-time hero of mine and I know being in Jerry's band paved the way for this. Sam's job is similar to Jerry's in that it is an acoustic jam band and Sam wants us to step out there and build our solos and take our time with it. For the first few gigs with Sam I remember he would whisper to me right before my solo, 'Take your time.' He was telling me to build it up in order to draw people in. I have found that having more space between your passages allows you to do more things. Sam is a master at building solos. He knows how to build them up to where he is pulling everybody in. It is great

to watch both he and Jerry do that."

When asked what it feels like to be back playing acoustic music, Keith said, "I love it. Playing with the Chicks and other commercial artists is fun, but this acoustic music is the stuff I cut my teeth on. I have such a history with it that I am having a blast. It is so much fun every time we go out. It was the same when I was playing with Jerry and playing with Skaggs felt the same way. They always left a huge open palette for me to do my own thing. It was a huge opportunity and a huge blessing. I never got bored. I've been very fortunate because guys like Ricky Skaggs, Jerry Douglas, and Sam Bush are the guys whose music I was raised on and the guys I used to idolize as a kid. To have the opportunity to play with these guys...it is not work at all. It is a blast."

Regarding the difference between electric and acoustic guitar techniques, Keith said, "The way someone like Ray Flacke or even Albert Lee plays electric is an art in itself that is totally different from flatpicking bluegrass guitar. The scales, notes, and approach for the left hand are very much the same. The thing that changes the most is the right-hand technique. With electric it is more of a stiff right hand and you are pulling up a lot, playing double stops with your fingers, in general, using the strength of that hand. Flatpicking, for me, is all about fighting away tension in the right hand and the discipline that comes with that. So hopping back and forth between acoustic and electric, at times, is a challenge."

Since Keith had been a fiddle player and a banjo player prior to learning how to play the guitar, he had been familiar with the repertoire of bluegrass music and fiddle tunes before he ever picked up the guitar. While most beginning guitar players begin by learning how to play the chord progressions, and then the melodies, of the standard tunes as played by a teacher, printed in a book, or recorded by another guitar player on CD, Keith's experience was different. He said, "To be honest with you, when I first started learning how to play chords on the guitar, I already knew how to do it. My dad is a really good rhythm guitar player and he used to back me up when I played the banjo. I would watch him and so it was almost like I knew the chords before I ever picked up the guitar. It was weird: one day I just picked up the guitar and knew how to play the chords because I had watched him so often."

Regarding learning lead guitar, Keith said, "I knew a lot of fiddle tunes from playing fiddle and banjo, so I first started on guitar by transferring my fiddle and banjo licks to the guitar. I would try to pick them out. I mainly learned by transferring stuff over. Also, a lot of the melodies are based inside the chords, so if you know the chords you can pick out the melodies. That is kind of what I did."

In addition to his current work with Jerry Douglas and Sam Bush, Skaggs Family Records is getting ready to release Keith's solo CD. Keith said that the project started out with he and Andy Leftwich (Skaggs' fiddle player) working on the arrangements and tracking the rough cuts of the songs. He said, "Back about a year ago when Andy and I started tracking I remember thinking, 'Man, I'd love to have Byron House and Scott Vestal on this thing.' We had talked about it some, but then we had to put it on hold. When Sam called and offered me the job with the band he said, 'By the way, you know Byron is in the band already but Scott Vestal is gonna start playing banjo with us!' During our first trip out we talked about it and by the time we got off the bus we had booked the sessions."

After having been a prominent performer and songwriter in bluegrass and country music for fifteen years, Keith figured that the time was ripe for this solo project. He said, "I have always wanted to do one and about a year ago I just decided to get some of these ideas down. It started growing and the next thing you know I had more than half of the record done. I just thought, 'Shoot, I'll keep going.'"

The CD includes both vocal and instrumental cuts with the vocals being in the majority. However, Keith said, "There is only one instrumental ('Duncan Station') but the songs are very 'instrumental,' accommodating to a lot of breaks." That's great because in addition to Keith, Andy Leftwich, Scott Vestal, and Byron House, guest artists on the recording include Jerry Douglas, Ricky Skaggs, and Sam Bush. Regarding a genre classification for the CD, Keith said, "It is hard to classify. It is mostly acoustic. There are no drums, but there are some textures and layers here and there, like electric guitar and Wurlitzer, that are keenly placed. Some of it is bluegrass, but some of the stuff is more Americana. I don't know that I could really classify it."

Keith continued, "Regardless of the success of the record, I feel like I can look

Keith Sewell performing with Jerry Douglas

Keith Sewell in the studio working on his new CD, soon to be relased by Skaggs Family Records

back and say that I did something that had no stipulations or boundaries on it. The one goal was to be creative. Ricky was great about giving me creative control. He just said, 'Go to town.' He basically gave me the reins and said, 'Make a record.' So it has been really fun." Keith's new CD should be released in July of 2005.

Keith's Guitars

Keith's first guitar was a Japanese D-45 copy that belongs to his father. He now plays a mahogany Collings Winfield model (formerly known as the Clarence White model). His other main axe is a Bourgeois Dreadnought with an Adirondack top. He prefers to play the Bourgeois on stage with Sam Bush because he said, "Sam's band is so loud that I really have to have an under saddle pickup, but the Collings has a through-saddle and it is really impossible to put an undersaddle pickup on that guitar." I am using the Bourgeois with an I-Mix. I got the undersaddle pickup and a mic inside that I mix in. I also found a secret that Scott Vestal told me about what he does with his banjos. He gets a great plugged-in banjo sound by stuffing his banjo with cotton batting. I started to think, 'Well, that is a good idea.' So I bought some and stuffed the inside of my guitar and put a feedback buster in the soundhole. It totally deadens it, but when you plug it in it takes all of that low unwanted 'woofy' thing that you get in a PA out of there. But it still has the dynamics. I've been doing that and it is working great."

On sessions Keith uses both his Collings and his Bourgeois. He said that on the sessions for his solo record he mainly used the Collings, but on Jerry Douglas' record he mainly used the Bourgeois. Additionally, Keith was featured on FGM Records' newest release *Songs for Sophie: A Collings Collective*. He wrote and performed a wonderful crosspicking instrumental "Guardian Angels" for this benefit CD. For more information about this CD, please see the ad on page 3.

On the next page we have transcribed a solo from one of Keith's original tunes, "Duncan Station." This tune will be featured on Keith's upcoming Skaggs Family Records release. On the audio CD which accompanies this issue Keith plays the solo up to speed and then slows it down for instructional purposes.

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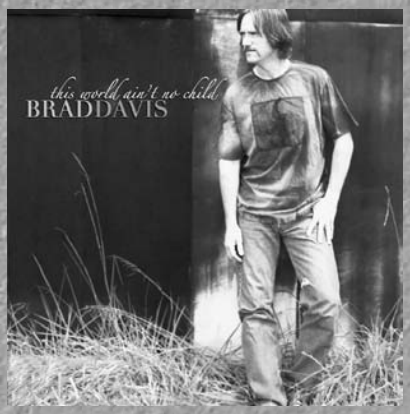
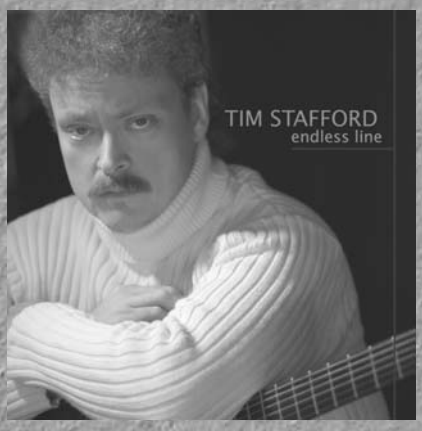


This World Ain't No Child

Tim Stafford



Endless Line

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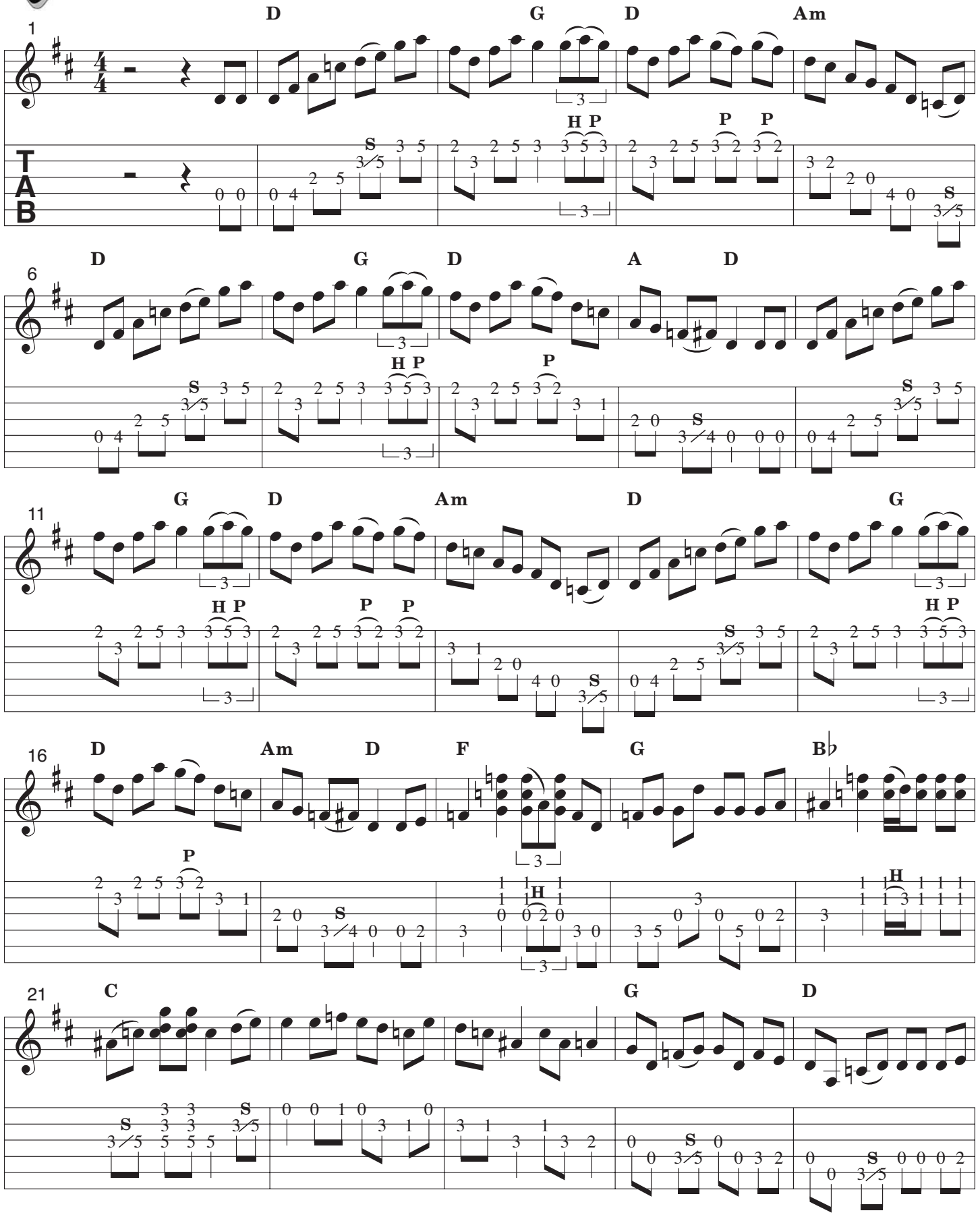
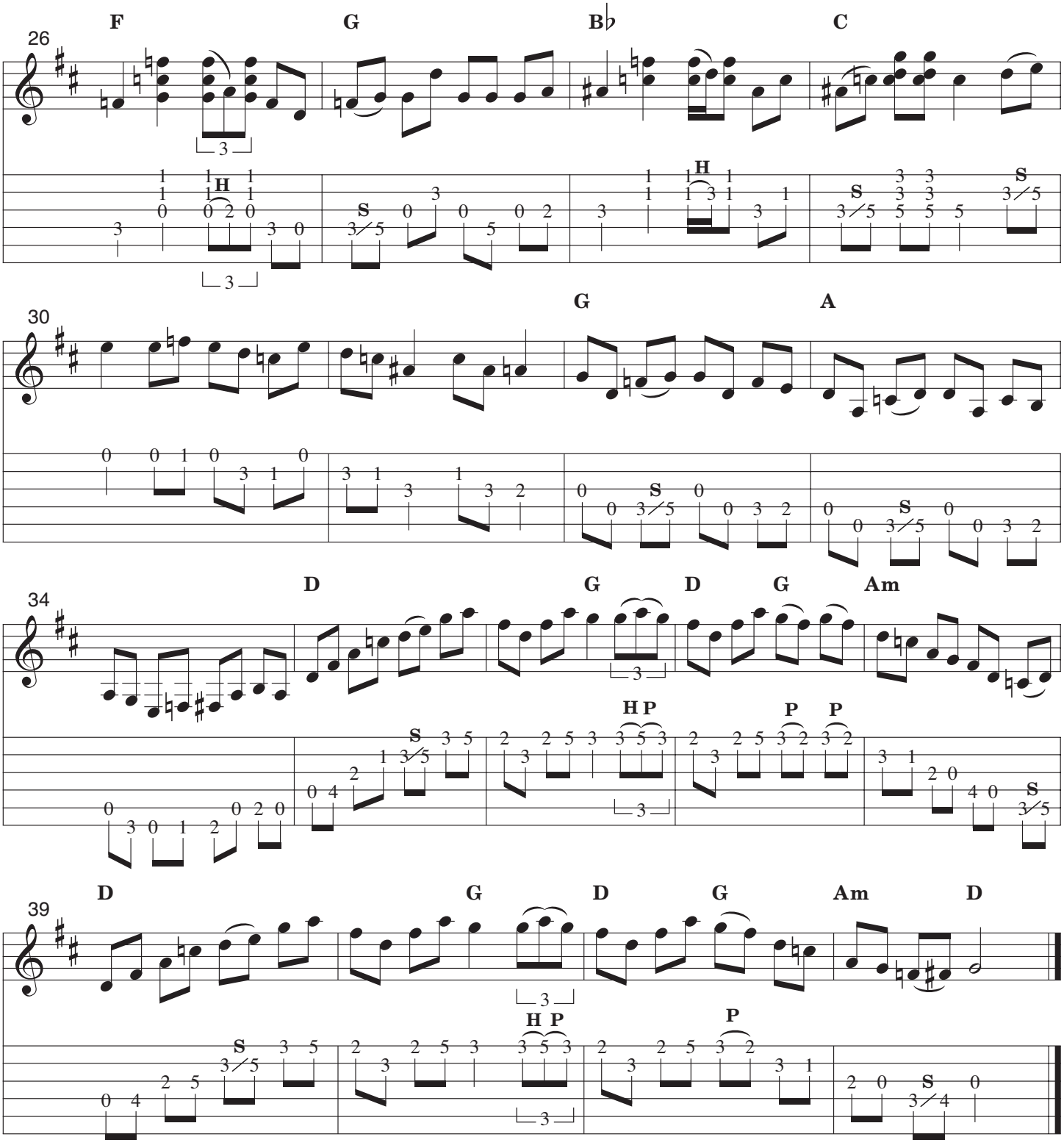
for more information about these, and other, FGM Records releases visit www.fgmrecords.com

Audio CD
Tracks 3 & 5

Duncan Station

Written by Keith Sewell
Transcribed by Brad Davis

Duncan Station (con't)

Molly Bloom

by Craig Vance

This tune has always been one of my favorites for several reasons. It's not terribly difficult, and can be a great tool for improvisation. It's much like a scale exercise with a melody thrown in. In this particular version, I have chosen to accentuate the lower register.

The tune has made appearances in the magazine a couple times in the past. Adam Granger gave us the higher—or the octave—portion of the melody in the September/October 2003 issue (Vol. 7, No. 6). Dan Huckabee covered it in the January/February 2004 issue (Vol. 8, No. 2). That particular rendition also explored the higher part. This version is closer to the Rice/Blake version on their collaborative CD *Norman Blake & Tony Rice 2* (Rounder 0266). The melody here begins on the low E string instead of the octave on the 3rd or G-string. I took a little of each of their breaks and meshed them together.

Try this version and experiment by mixing the higher parts in there. I think it sounds more interesting by mixing the low with the high. For example, begin the A part of the melody in the lower register. Then, when the A part repeats, try adding in the higher register. It makes the tune more exciting to play and I think it catches the ear better.

Enjoy this gem of a tune, and I'll meet you back here in the next edition.

Flatpicking Guitar Magazine pays tribute to

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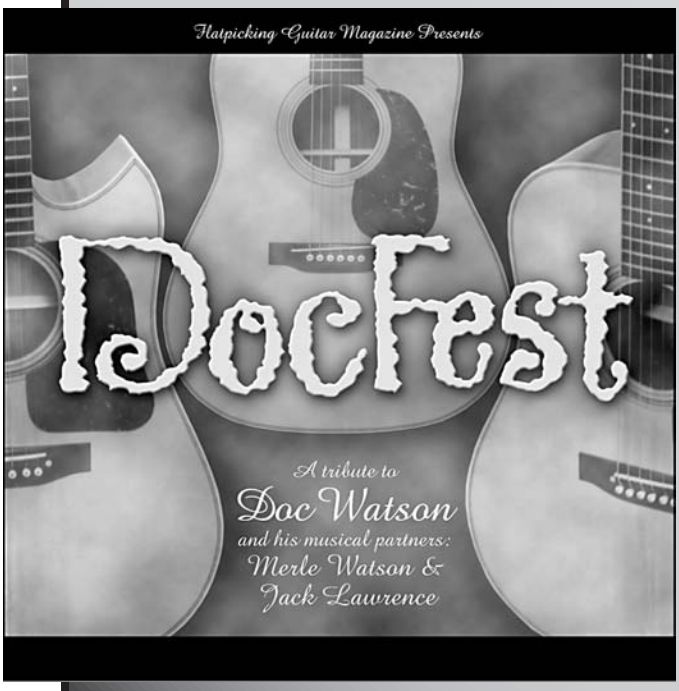
This CD includes eighteen tunes by many of today's top flatpickers. Each of the artist on this project were inspired to learn the song that they perform after first hearing the song performed by Doc Watson with one of his musical partners Merle Watson or Jack Lawrence. The CD includes Fourteen Vocals Songs and Four Instrumental Tunes as follows:



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Alberta/Billy In The Lowground (Orrin Star & Russell Scholle)
Train That Carried My Girl From Town (Brad Davis & Whitewater)
Way Downtown (John Tindel & RST)
Cotton Eyed Joe (David Grier)
A-Roving On A Winter's Night (Chris & Sally Jones)
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Little Sadie (Adam Granger)
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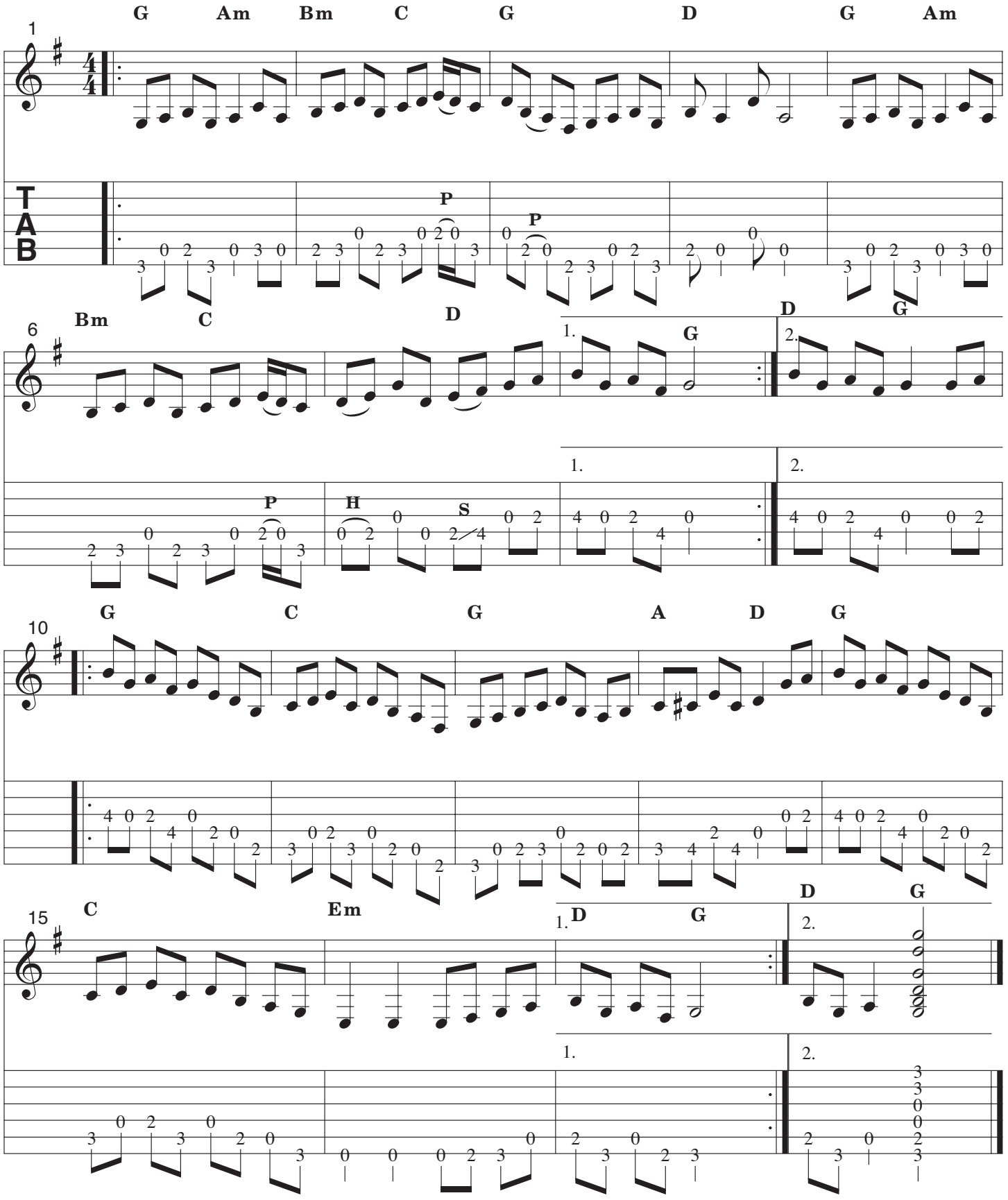
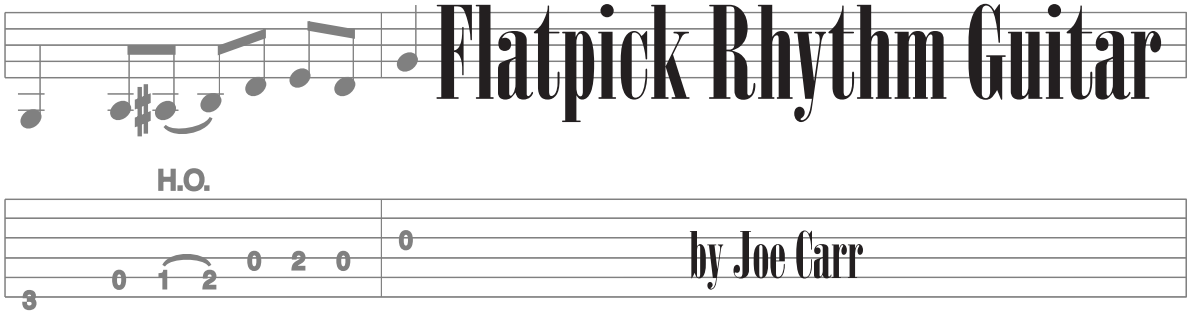
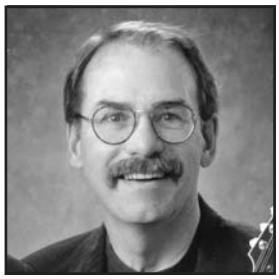
Tracks 7 & 8

Molly Bloom

Arranged by Craig Vance

Flatpick Rhythm Guitar

by Joe Carr



Key Changes in Western Swing

As I write this, we Texans are celebrating Bob Wills' 100th birthday with special concerts all across the state. Wills' infectious blend of blues, jazz and fiddle dance music set the Southwest on fire in the 1930s and 40s. Although Nashville never really embraced this music, Western Swing has had a major impact on country acts including Ray Price, Merle Haggard, George Strait, Willie Nelson, Asleep at the Wheel and many others. Tonight, as you read this, "Faded Love" and "San Antonio Rose" will be played in dance halls across Texas and the dance floor will be full. This is the Bob Wills legacy.

While key changes are unusual in many traditional folk musics, they are quite common in Western Swing. Generally, key changes in Western Swing allow songs written in fiddle-friendly keys to be changed to vocal-friendly keys. American fiddle tradition has numerous tunes such as "Flopped Eared Mule" and "Forked Deer" that change keys between the A and B section. Wills himself played instrumental versions of "San Antonio Rose," "Spanish Two Step," and others in two keys. In these tunes, the key change sounds very natural and requires no transition chords to set up the change. The changes are often the interval of a fifth (D to A for example).

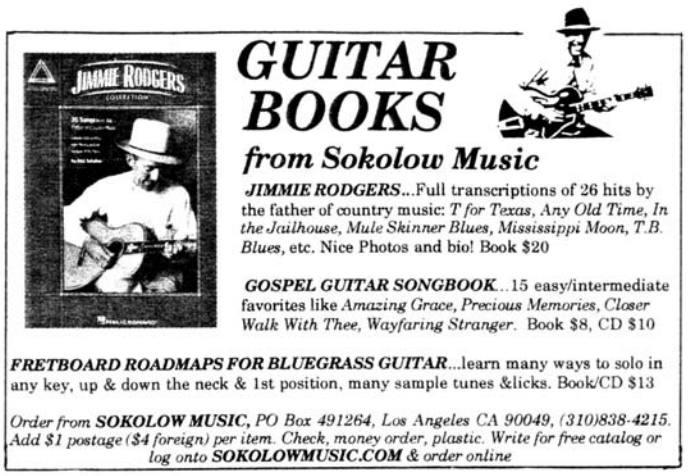
When "San Antonio Rose" (1938) was re-recorded as a vocal number, the title was changed to "New San Antonio Rose" (1940). The original recording was in D and A for the fiddle. To suit Tommy Duncan's voice and Wills' big band of the time, it was sung in Ab. It is no surprise that once the band moves from D to Ab, no fiddles are heard on the track. The entire Ab vocal section is carried by the horns. After WWII, Wills' band reverted to an all-string lineup. Tommy Duncan began singing "San Antonio Rose" in the more string-friendly key of A.

In the late 1930s, Wills and his band, the Texas Playboys, were known primarily in Texas and Oklahoma. Bing Crosby's popular 1940 recording of "New San Antonio Rose" made the tune, and the band, a national hit. As a result, the Playboys moved to Hollywood shortly thereafter where they appeared in a number of "B" western movies. Wills scoured his song list for other fiddle instrumentals that could be sung. "Faded Love," "Spanish Two-Step," "Spanish Fandango," and "Maiden's Prayer" were all given words and feature key changes in their vocal versions.

The best way to create a seamless sounding key change is to use the 5 chord of the new key. "Faded Love" is played in D on the fiddle and is often sung in the key of A. The key change is accomplished by adding the following chords to the end of the fiddle section: (D D#) E7.

The E7 is the 5 chord of the new key (A.) This direct chromatic approach is very popular and sounds very natural.

The "5 of the new key" helps key changes sound natural and less "jarring." The move from D to Ab in "New San Antonio Rose" uses an ingenious set of chords to set up the change. They are (one measure each) D-F-Bb7-Eb7. Eb is the 5 chord in Ab, so the change is complete. The D to F move is the only surprise since it is a rather arbitrary interval of flat third. The moves from F to Bb and from Bb to Eb sound great and natural since they simply go round the circle of fifths. I'll discuss the circle later if anyone is interested. Next time – three-note versus four-note chords.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Beginner's Page

by Dan Huckabee

Segment your practice time

In the March/April 2004 issue I talked about setting up your practice room. Assuming your room is now conducive to a good focused practice session, let's talk about exactly how to arrange this activity in order to make the most progress we possibly can.

Make no mistake about it, the way you budget your practice time at home has a great deal to do with the guitar player that you become. Sure there are always going to be people who have more talent, but if you follow a logical plan, you might just find yourself surpassing your talented neighbor.

First, you need to warm up. The key to warming up is playing things that are slow and simple. You could choose your easiest tune, scale, or finger exercise, but you should warm up with lead work rather than chords, because individual notes will loosen your wrist better than strumming. You should play something that's easy—whether it's tunes, scales, or exercises—because this will relax both your mind and fingers, and most of all, you should play very slowly. I don't recommend a metronome or jamming along with a CD to warm up because interfacing with anything will create some tension. Warming up should be private, personal, and meditative. But how long should you spend warming up? Good question! As a rule of thumb, I'd say never less than 5 minutes. Cold weather and a stressful day would call for a longer warm-up segment. I wouldn't recommend exceeding 20 minutes in the most extreme circumstances, because you need to budget your time well enough to include other tasks.

Next you should jump right into new material. This is the real heart of the practice session. If you save this "new material" for the last, you run the risk of starting it with tired fingers or a tired brain. You should start a new project in every serious practice session, because a new tune advances your guitar ability. The exception to this rule would be if you haven't completely mastered your last "new tune" from a previous practice session. We all are guilty of having lots of half-finished projects. That's OK, but when you never master anything, you never become a good guitar player.

Keep in mind that you don't have to learn a whole new tune every time you sit down to practice. You could learn a new lick, part of a new tune, or a new scale. In other words, you should dedicate the heart of every practice session to learning something new.

If you're like me, after you learn something new, your brain will be a little over-heated. Now's the time to give it a rest and start the next phase of your practice session, the "review/maintenance" phase. This is your opportunity to go over your old stuff. If you don't already have a list of the tunes you have learned, I recommend that you start one. Play every song in this list at least one time. This will prevent getting rusty on the material that you worked so hard to learn in the first place. Believe me, maintaining a song is much easier than having to go back and learn it again and it's easy to forget a song that you don't keep playing regularly. At this point you should make a note of any song that you are having problems with.

The final segment of your practice session is the part that I'll call the "elective" phase. You've already warmed up, broken ground with a new project, and done maintenance work your old stuff. You've worked hard and now you've earned the right to have some fun. Put on a CD and jam along with it. Develop some new ideas. Listen to some great flatpickers. Try to write your own song. Do some finger exercises. Learn some theory. Do a workout with the metronome. This segment is just as important as the rest of the session, but it's your time to choose to do whatever you feel like doing strictly for enjoyment.

So what we have here is a practice session divided into four sections: warm-up, new material, review, and elective. I think you should practice a minimum of 30 minutes a day, and a minimum of four days a week. But, if you're just starting out, your fingers might be too sore to practice that much and you won't have any old material to review. In fact, I think that when you're just starting out, that your practice needs to be a little forced for the first few months. That early diligence will pay off in fun a few months down the line, and you might find yourself practicing longer than you realized, simply because you became so immersed that you lost all concept of time. There's really no need to worry about how long you practice, but it's good to get an idea about how much time other people spend, for comparison purposes. After you've been playing for a while, you might find yourself spending 4-5 hours and you might wind up in festival jams sessions that last even longer.

We've created a DVD lesson called *Perfecting Bluegrass Guitar Solos* designed to make the most of your practice time. You can check it out on our website (www.musicians-workshop.com) or call us at 800-543-6125. Meantime, look forward to your next practice session. I'm sure it will be productive and rewarding.

Guitar Maintenance and Repair

by Frank Ford

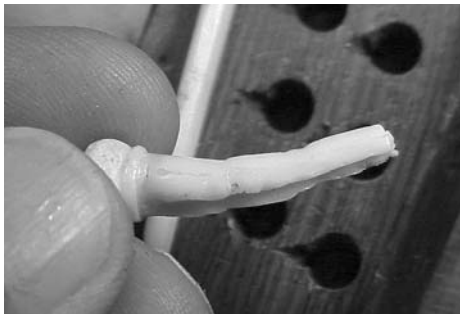
Pre-Season Checkup

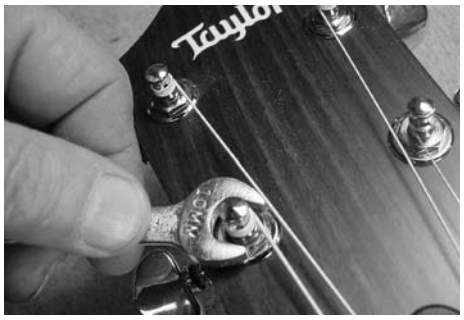
Here we are at the start of festival time, and now's a good time to take a look at your music making gear. Even if you're not experiencing any particularly troublesome symptoms of poor playability, it couldn't hurt to check out the old axe to make sure it's ready to go for the season. Your friendly local luthier will charge only a small fee for restringing your guitar, and would be likely to check out and correct small problems before they become significant. There's a lot you can do for yourself, too, as you look over your instrument before running off to festivals, workshops, etc. Here, then, are a few areas to look at:

Change the strings. Really, most of us don't do that as often as we might to get the best tonal performance. Now is a good time to review your stringing technique so you don't end up with a messy job like this one:

A big wad of wound string can make tuning imprecise and unstable.

As you change strings, take a look at those old bridge pins. The plastic ones are prone to deformation and can get chewed up to the point that they're hard to extract, and they don't hold the ball in place against the bridge plate. So if your pins are starting to look like this one, well, you know what to do—get some new pins—they're cheap enough:



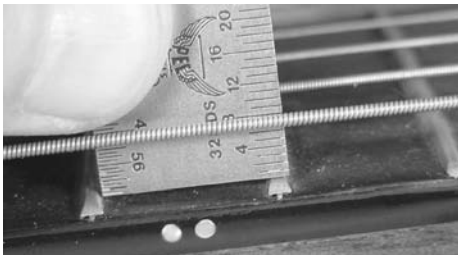
Loose hardware can be particularly annoying, and can lead to damage if unattended. Check out the tuners. Are tightly mounted? If they mount with nuts from the front side, slip a wrench on and give it a little pull to make sure the nut isn't loose:

This is particularly important in the first year of a guitar's life because the wood compresses a bit and the tuners can loosen.

Check the back of the peghead for signs of loose tuner mounting screws:

If you have enclosed gears with replaceable buttons, make sure that the button attachment screw is reasonably secure. It doesn't need to be very tight, the screw serves to hold the entire mechanism together, so be sure to notice if the screw has backed out or if tuner is starting to come apart. Schaller tuners and those with Phillips screws are less likely to become loose, but watch out for those older Grover Rotomatic tuners that have a slotted screw holding the button on:

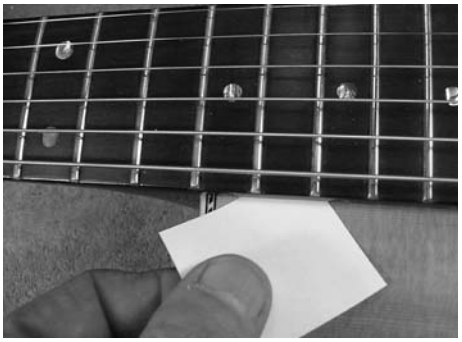
If your tuners have open gearing, now might well be the time for a small drop of oil on the moving parts. Most open gears fail because of lack of lubrication, not from a lack of "quality."

As you tune up after restringing, consider how your guitar is playing. Barre an "F" chord—if it's about as easy as a "G" then your nut is not too high. Pick around in different areas. A string that buzzes only in the open position tells you that the nut action is a bit too low. Buzzing in the general area between the nut and the fifth fret may be a sign of a too-tight truss rod. A nasty buzz in only one fretted position may indicate an uneven, loose or damaged fret. High action up the neck may be a sign that the truss rod is a bit loose, that the neck angle may need resetting, or that the action is simply a bit high and could be lowered at the saddle. Any of these symptoms should lead you to a consultation with your local luthier before you hit the road or the jam scene.



Peer around behind the bridge and see if it's still firmly glued to the top. If you have any suspicion, use one of those little yellow sticky notes and try to jam it under the back edge of your bridge:

If it slips under more than about 1/16", it may be time to reglue the bridge before serious damage starts. Left unattended a loose bridge can result in some pretty nasty damage to a sensitive guitar top!

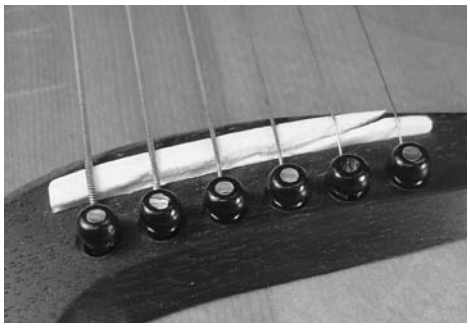
That same little paper can help you identify other, potentially less serious areas of glue failure or looseness:

Pickguards are protective devices and primarily cosmetic, but on older Martins and other instructments, they can cause top damage as they curl and shrink with age:

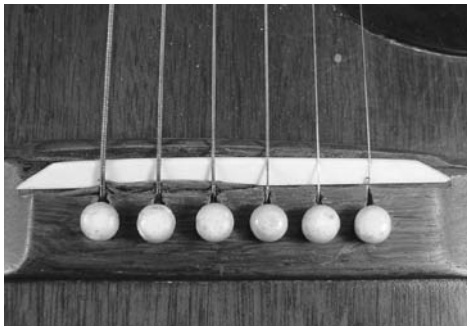
A curly pickguard can be downright annoying to look at and use, too.

As it ages, the ivoroid or plastic body and neck binding can become unglued, loosening at the waist of the guitar:

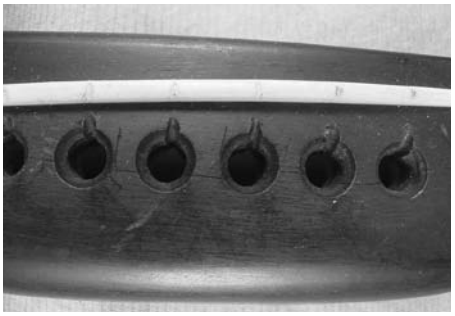
For sure, you don't want to snag the binding and rip it loose— best to have loose binding reglued as soon as possible.

Look again at the bridge. If you notice that the saddle is leaning forward, you get some advice from an experienced luthier. A leaning saddle may fail unexpectedly, or may be a sign that the bridge itself is cracked in that area. If it's really leaning over, the saddle itself might be broken:





Most of the time a broken bridge will show only a "hairline" crack between the bridge pins or near the saddle for some time before failing completely:



It can be a bit confusing as you look the body over for cracks. There may be "cold checks" in the finish—tiny cracks that are only cosmetic. A finish check may run along the grain lines of the wood, but usually does not, instead veering off in a curve that crosses over the grain lines. Cracks in the wood almost always run along the grain. Don't count on a body crack to be "just a surface crack." Guitar bodies are made of wood that's barely 1/8" thick, so any crack in a top, side, or back is certain to go all the way through, and may be likely to weaken that part significantly. As you look the guitar body over for cracks, try to view it in reflected light. That way, you'll be able to see if there's any difference in the plane of the finished surface, whether the cracked area appears to bend downward or pucker upward.

Press on the crack lightly with your finger to see if the wood appears to bend on the line of the crack. Evaluating the significance of body cracks is certainly a job for the repairer with an experienced eye. Your local luthier will look all around inside to get the complete picture of what's going on and how it can best be repaired.

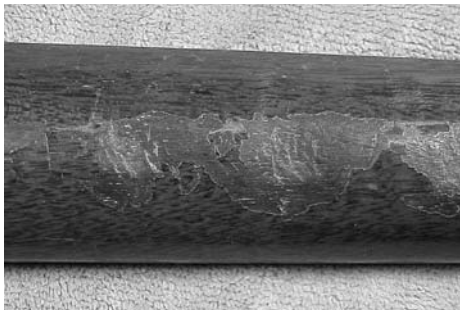
If your guitar has a pickup with a powered preamp, today is a good time to replace the battery. I figure once a year whether it needs it or not:

Don't check it, replace it. A new battery once a year is cheap insurance against being embarrassed in performance! Now is also a great time to look over the condition of any electronic accessories. A new battery for the electronic tuner. How about the cables? Again, if you're traveling, you don't want the hassle of trying to find a cable at the last minute.

Take inventory of your other important accessories. Strap still OK? Especially with those acoustic electric jack end pins, the end of the strap can wear and get loose The jack itself is prone to working loose, too.

If you don't lose capos as often as I do, you might do well to check the rubber pad, and see if yours is doing its job properly. This one is ready for replacement, I think:

You don't want the back of your neck looking like this one, so make sure the protective pads are still firmly in place:



Consider the case—it may be worn and look ugly, but it still works, right? Maybe, but consider how you'll use it when you are at camp, or wherever. That rope handle may be fine around town, in and out of your car, but how about when you have to hike with it?

Much, or all of the above may seem obvious, but it's important, too. Simply keeping an eye on your gear will make a big difference in how well it performs for you.

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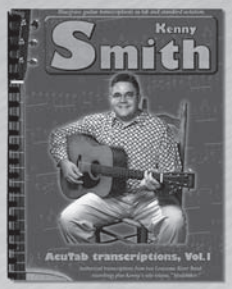

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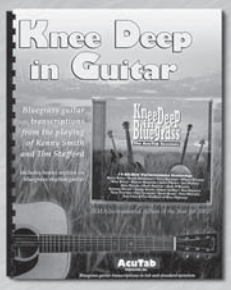

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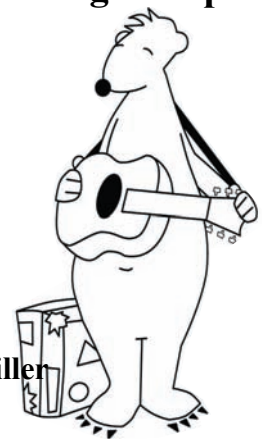

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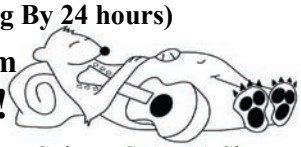

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Kaufman's Corner

by Steve Kaufman

Bye Bye Blues

Hi friends, and here's a killer song from the past. I think it started off as a Dixieland jazz tune and has been played by more flatpickers than you can shake a capo at. I learned it from Doc from the *Good Deal in Nashville* album. I used this tune in 1978 in the Nationals at Winfield and it has been evolving ever since. I was reintroduced to it when I re-cut all my guitar parts on my latest CD *Stylin'* with the late Red Rector, the mandolin great.

I have marked the first couple of places that you will find fingering issues. Use these fingerings. You'll thank me for it later. Also notice the timing of the first measure. It's a quarter note—eighth—quarter—eighth and quarter making the four beats of the measure. The timing is pretty bent here: DA-da-DA-da-DA. Play along with the CD for accuracy. Measures 2-3 are made up of an "F" position at the 4th fret making it an Ab. Use the little finger for the note on the 2nd string that changes. Be sure to alternate D-U on your picking here. You will find the same pattern at the A7 measures as well.

Have fun with this great song and if you want to hear new variations you can go to my www.flatpik.com site and order my latest CD.

Ciao for now,
Steve K
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Bye Bye Blues

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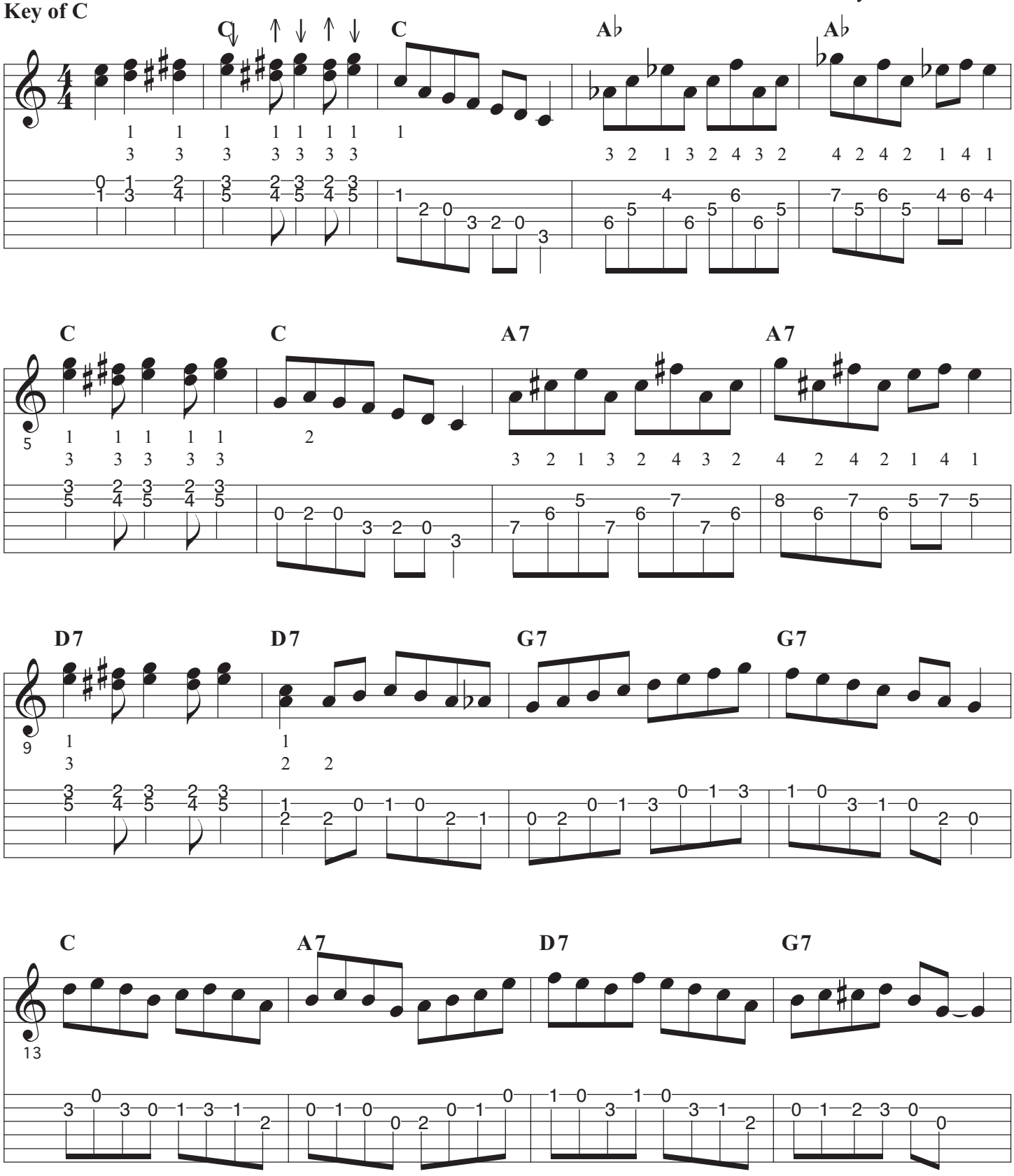
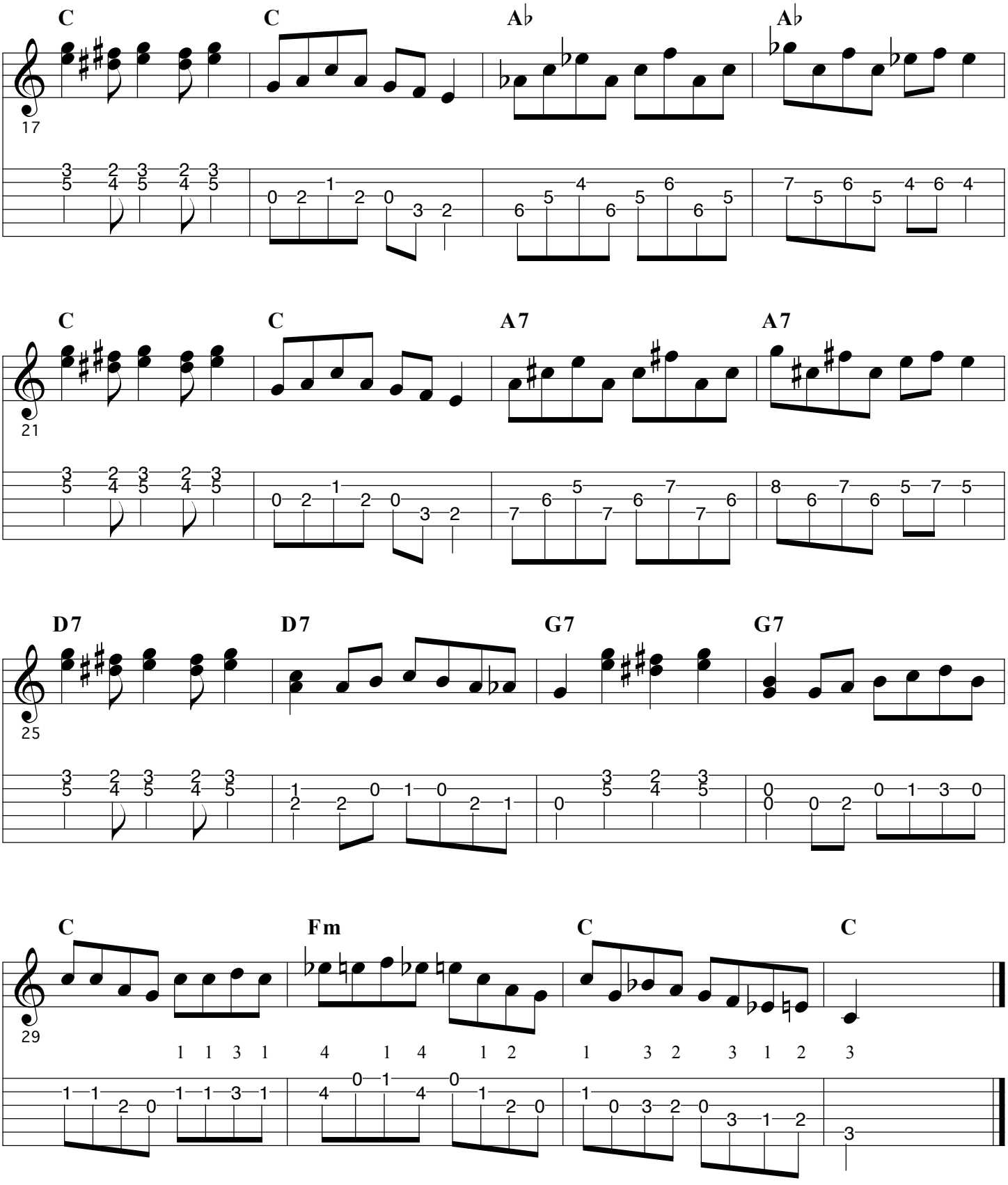
Arr. by Steve Kaufman

Key of C



Bye Bye Blues (con't)

Adventures in Acoustic Music: Defining Chord Types

by John Carlini

I have found that there is some confusion regarding chord symbols and what they mean. So, the purpose of the column this time is to clear up some of that misunderstanding.

The harmony on which Western music is based is called tertial harmony (that is, harmony built in thirds). Using the major scale as a source, I'm sure you know that a major triad is 1, 3, and 5 of that scale, and that a minor triad is 1, b3, and 5 out of the same scale. Since it's easiest to think of the key of C, we'll use the C scale as our basis. So a C major triad is C, E, and G. When you play a big ol' C major chord in the open position, you are really just doubling some of those notes. From the 6th string to the 1st string you have G, C, E, G, C, and E!

Now take a look at **Ex. 1.** All the Cs, Es and Gs on the guitar fingerboard are located. How many C major triads can you find? I've been playing the guitar for 48 years and I'm still finding 'em!

BTW: The notes do not have to be in any particular order.

In **Ex. 2** all the C minor triad notes are located. That would be C, Eb, and G. Again, see how many C min triads you can find. Major and minor triads form the harmonic basis for bluegrass, fiddle tunes and folk styles.

Now, when you add a fourth third to the chord—that is, extend it by another third—your harmony enters the realm of the 7th. That is the domain of swing, jazz, and, in part, bluegrass and folk music. What happens when you add that extra note to a C major triad? Well, you end up with 1, 3, 5, and 7 out of the major scale. That is called a major 7th chord. You'll see it with four or five different labels, such as M7, Δ7 (I never got that one), and my personal favorite, Maj7. (No questions about that!)

You won't find Maj7 chords in bluegrass or fiddle tune music, but you will hear them sometimes in folk music and certainly in swing, jazz, and pop.

Ex. 3 shows where all the CMaj7 chords are located. You know what to do! Useful Info: Generally, the 5th (G) is expendable. Try finding chords that contain just 1, 3, and 7. Thirds and sevenths are the definitive tones in various types of 7th chords.

Now, here is a chunk of theory that I find is misunderstood by some of my students. When you see a chord symbol that says simply "7", that means the chord contains the flatted 7th! I know it seems confusing, but that's just the way the terminology evolved. So, Maj7 means 1, 3, 5, 7, but "7" means 1, 3, 5, and b7! Therefore, you'd "spell" C7 as C, E, G, and Bb.

A 7th chord is restless. It wants to go someplace or resolve. That is why C7 resolves to F. That is why D7 resolves to G, and so on. 7th chords are known as dominant chords and in jazz they are the "V" of a "II–V" progression. 7th chords are all over bluegrass and every style of music and they are "home base" in the blues!

Ex. 4 shows where all the C7 chords are located. Again, you can "nix" the 5 if you want. You will still hear the chord speak, C7.

OK. When you take a minor triad and add a "flatted 7th" to it, the result is called a min7 chord (that is, 1, b3, 5, and b7). So, Cmin7 would be C, Eb, G, and Bb. Min7 chords are not used in bluegrass music, but are used in New Acoustic Music as played by Tony Rice, David Grisman, and others. Of course they are a big part of swing and jazz music and they are the "II" of a "II–V" progression (for example, Dmin7–G7).

Ex. 5 shows where all the Cmin7 chords are located. Reminder: The fifth is part of the chord but not absolutely necessary to define the quality of min7. At this point, you should be getting the message that 3rds and 7ths are the tones that define the chord type.

There are, of course, many more chords, but they evolve from the types we just explored. Hopefully, this should clear up any misunderstanding about these basic chord types, because once you "dig" the basics, you are ready to move on.

As always, the most important aspect in all this is to "hear" the chords. Till next time, please enjoy experimenting in your "chord lab"!

Please visit John's web site (www.johncarlini.com) for the latest performance and teaching info and acoustic music news. Check out the CD by the John Carlini Quartet, The Game's Afoot!, featuring Don Stiernberg, Brian Glassman, and Steve Holloway, w/special guest, Pat Cloud at www.fgmrecords.com. John and mandolinist, Don Stiernberg, also record for Blue Night Records and can be heard on their latest release, Angel Eyes. Please visit www.bluenightrecords.com for more info.

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Chord Types

Chromatic Scale:	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C
C Scale Degrees:	1		2		3	4		5		6		7	8

Ex. 1. C Major Triads = 1, 3, 5 (C, E G)

E			G				C				E			G
	C				E		G					C		
G					C			E			G			
		E			G				C				E	
			C			E			G					C
E			G				C				E			G
			o		o		o		o		oo			o

Ex. 2. C Minor Triads = 1, b3, 5 (C, Eb, G)

			G				C			Eb				G
	C			Eb			G					C		
G					C		Eb				G			
	Eb				G				C			Eb		
			C			Eb			G					C
			G				C			Eb				G
			o		o		o		o		oo			o

Ex. 3. C Maj7 Chords = 1, 3, 5, 7 (C, E, G, B)

E			G				B	C			E			G
B	C				E			G				B	C		
G				B	C				E			G			
		E			G				B	C				E	
		B	C				E			G				B	C
E			G				B	C				E			G
			o		o		o		o			oo			o

Chord Types (con't)

Ex. 4. C7 Chords = 1, 3, 5, b7 (C, E, G, Bb)

E			G			Bb		C			E			G
	C				E			G			Bb		C	
G			Bb		C				E			G		Bb
		E			G			Bb		C				E
	Bb		C				E			G			Bb	
E			G			Bb		C				E		
			o		o		o		o			oo		o

Ex. 5. Cmin7 Chords = 1, b3, 5, b7 (C, Eb, G, Bb)

			G			Bb		C			Eb			G
	C			Eb				G			Bb		C	
G			Bb		C			Eb				G		Bb
	Eb				G			Bb		C			Eb	
	Bb		C			Eb				G			Bb	
			G			Bb		C			Eb			G
			o		o		o		o			oo		o

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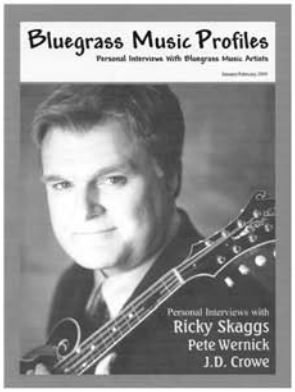

Bluegrass artists we've gotten personal with include Bobby Osborne, Jimmy Martin, Dale Ann Bradley, IIIrd Tyme Out, J.D. Crowe, Lonesome River Band, Josh Graves, Ralph Stanley, Doyle Lawson, Larry Sparks, Tim Graves, Dave Evans, Mac Wiseman, Mountain Heart, Charlie Waller, Wildfire, Kenny Baker and many more!

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Randy Kohrs is featured in BMP's Jan/Feb issue!

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by Jeff McCrory

Its All About Tone

I'm a flatpicker! I grew up in the mountains of East Tennessee, followed Doc Watson and Norman Blake around the hollows when I was in high school, tried to copy their styles, and even drove down to Wartrace, Tennessee to order a guitar from the elder John Gallagher before he handed the business over to his son Don. I've also owned or played nearly every contender for the best in flatpicking guitars (Martin, Mossman, Bourgeois, Santa Cruz, Collings, etc.). I tell you this because of my surprise in walking out of my local guitar store recently with what has to be one of the best sounding new guitars I've ever heard, a Goodall Grand Concert/OM. Because of this surprise, I emailed Dan Miiler and told him someone has to tell the flatpicking community about Goodalls. Here's my attempt.

James Goodall is no newcomer to making guitars. He started handcrafting guitars in 1972 in the same fertile San Diego community that gave rise to Bob Taylor, Greg Deering, and the Breedloves. In 1984 James moved his growing company to Northern California, and then in 1992 moved to his current location in Hawaii. James, like some other luthiers (Bill Collings comes to mind), is probably now in peak form, old enough to have valuable experience and yet young enough to be sharpening the cutting edge.

I got hold of James and his wife Jean, whose shop is in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, and tried to convince them to fly my wife and me over for an interview. My ploy didn't work! Here's what I learned from speaking with them and from talking with numerous others. When James started producing guitars in 1972 he went back to the raw basics of sound, reading every book he could find and studying in detail the science of acoustic tone. The Goodall motto says it all: "Acoustic Excellence." James told me that when he began designing guitars he was not trying to copy anyone, but was intent upon developing at each point of construction a tone he could call his own.

I pressed James on what at each point of construction gives his guitars their unique tone. After stating that it was an orchestration of numerous things, which is no doubt true given the individual attention each of his instruments gets, he went on to provide some details. One aspect of Goodall's construction that seems to differ from traditional guitar making is his graduating the top of a guitar. James told me to think of a speaker cone, which moves more at the edge than in the middle. Goodall guitars are either very lightly scalloped (on the Traditional Model only on the lower X-brace) or not at all, giving rigidity to the center and lower bout of the tops. The movement of the top comes from graduating each top for each guitar, each top receiving its particular thickness, in order to allow the proper movement for sound. James also said that staying way from scalloping gives the top more central structural strength and keeps the tone from getting muddy, while providing articulation from bass to treble. Where many guitars gain their warmth from scalloping, Goodalls gain their warmth from top graduation.

James also said that whereas some builders have moved towards tiny bridge plates, his bridge plates remain a decent size, which gives his guitars more clarity and projection. I pushed him on this, and he said that a person could say that smaller bridge plates give more sound if they wanted to, but it was simply not true. Finally, one thing I noticed more on Goodalls than on other high end guitars is that James uses numerous wooden side braces, 14 total. I asked him why so many. He replied that he wants his sides to be rigid, not to absorb the sound, and wants them to provide a better foundation for the movement of the top. The stiffer the better he noted.

I titled this article "It's all about tone," because this is what I have gleaned in my playing and research on Goodall guitars. Tone is somewhat a subjective thing, but not overly so. Anyone who regularly picks guitars knows the difference between the classic Martin tone, the old Gibson tone, and the newer era guitar tones from Collings, Bourgeois, Santa Cruz and the smaller individual luthiers. When I asked Jean Goodall what she would be most happy hearing from people who played a Goodall she replied, "I would hope they would say they don't forget what the guitar sounds like." In like manner, James says that he aims for a tone that is musical, lyrical, rounded, and not closed in on itself; loud and focused but not like a banjo. Others describe the Goodall tone as strong fundamentals complemented with resonant overtones.

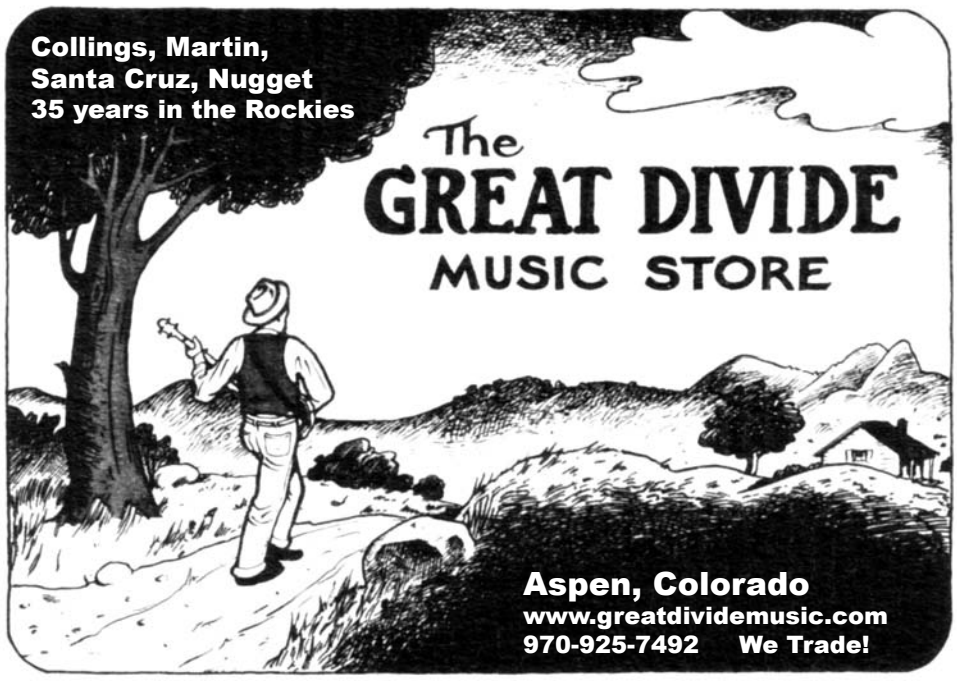
To my ears a Goodall guitar sounds like a focused Collings but with the depth of an older Martin. It was this lyrical, clear-but-deep tone that grabbed my attention and made me reach for my wallet.

The Goodall company employs nine guitar builders including James. James' wife Jean runs the administrative side of the company. Currently the company produces about 500 guitars a year. To give you a sense of scale, Collings made 1,200 guitars this year and Taylor produced some 70,000. The Goodalls plan on staying small with an emphasis upon craftsmanship and quality. Their guitars are flawless in detail and workmanship. James also uses the best of the best of woods: red (Adirondack) spruce, bearclaw Sitka, red cedar, and Port Orford Cedar to name just a few of the top woods; Brazilian, Madagascar, and Honduran rosewoods; Ziricote, cocobolo, African blackwood, claro walnut, mahogany and koa to name a few of the back and side woods. The guitars come with bound ebony fretboards and all-wood bindings. Most of the instruments have 1 3/4" spacing at the nut and 2 1/4" spacing at the saddle, which I find perfect for both flat and fingerpicking. James, as I have detailed above, also graduates the tops to produce his unique tone.

About five years ago James started using red (Adirondack) spruce, which began to draw the attention of flatpickers. At the same time he introduced what is now his best-selling line of guitars, the Traditional Model. I asked James why he hadn't produced a flatpicking guitar before. His rely was, "We've produced a flatpicking guitar from the very beginning. It was only recently that we changed the cosmetics to attract flatpickers." The Traditional Model comes with squared headstock and bridge, Waverlies, herringbone trim, and chevron marquetry backstrip. Amazingly, James very lightly scallops the lower X-brace on these guitars, stating that too much scallop tends to muddy the tone. The Traditional Model line includes a standard D size, an OM (which is slightly deeper than a standard OM), a long dreadnaught 12 fret, a baritone, and a 000-12 fret. Prices on the Traditional Series run from around $4,200 upwards, depending upon wood selection.

Whenever I saw a Goodall in the past I always thought to myself, "They're fingerpicking guitars, beautiful, exceptional quality, but not for the flatpicking crowd." I recently read a similar statement from Orrin Star, *FGM* columnist. Because I was writing this article on Goodalls, I emailed Orrin, who said I could quote him on Goodalls. Here's his comment: "While on tour in Ireland…I did a couple of shows with a UK bluegrass band called Grassroots, whose guitarist was sporting a recently purchased walnut Goodall OM, one of the most movingly great-sounding new guitars I've ever heard."

I would assume that your experience would be similar. If you haven't tried a Goodall, don't be fooled, these are exceptional flatpickers! Check out the Goodall website at www.goodallguitars.com.



Five Ways To Get The Most Out Of Your Visit To The Doctor's Office For Playing-Related Injuries (PRIs)

By Marc Darrow, MD, JD

Editor's Note: *Several issues ago Dr. Marc Darrow wrote an article for us about treating guitar-related injuries. Several subscribers contacted us wanting to know more specifics. As a result, Dr. Darrow has agreed to submit a series of articles on the treatment and prevention of these injuries, which will include information about body alignment and warm-up exercises.*

Sports medicine is big business in the United States, with thousands of clinics treating millions of weekend warriors. Go into a sports clinic as an athlete, and certainly—if you came to ours at Joint Rehab—you would very seldom hear the physician say, "Well you will just have to give it up." Instead, an aggressive plan is devised to do anything possible to get that warrior back to his sport.

Are musicians a different breed from athletes in their passions?

When a guitarist comes into a doctor's office complaining of finger, hand, elbow, shoulder or even back pain, why is it that the majority of these patients hear the physician tell them, "Well you are just going to have to stop playing?"

As a physician and a chronic pain specialist, I can tell you that while many of my colleagues understand an athlete's desire to continue playing, they do not understand the level of passion their musical patients have for their music.

For this same reason, the musician's need for healing is not considered as urgent and the prescription to stop playing can be given with little thought as to either the emotional or financial impact on the patient.

If you are told that your remedy is to stop playing, then perhaps you should consider other medical options. When seeking another opinion, go in armed with the information your doctor will need to get you back to your licks.

Getting the Most Out Of Your Visit to a Specialist

1. Find a musician-physician!

In my opinion, enough cannot be said for trying to find a pain specialist who is a musician and for finding a doctor who will encourage you to bring your instrument with you to the initial consultation and examination. Especially important, in my opinion, is to find a fellow guitarist, banjoist, or mandolinist.

A guitarist can develop chronic and debilitating pain for many reasons, ranging from poor posture, a too-heavy guitar, an incorrectly sized guitar, improper playing technique, or overplaying. Finding a doctor knowledged in the ways of the strings and bringing your guitar to the doctor's office will help rule out the obvious problems with the guitar, strap, technique, and stance while playing.

2. Be prepared to answer questions or tell your story.

Obviously, you want to play again or without pain as soon as possible. What is not-so-obvious is how to tell your doctor the "right things" about your injury:

- Tell your doctor when your pain began. Make sure you specifically mention a change in instrument (especially a change from nylon to steel strings or vice versa), a change in the type of music you are playing, or a change in the length of your playing or practice sessions.
- Talk about everything that hurts. A wrist pain may be diagnosed as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome when it may actually be a referred pain from ligament problems in the elbow.
- Tell your doctor when you feel the most discomfort and when you feel the least problems when playing and during regular everyday activities. Especially mention other activities that could aggravate your condition, such as the amount of hours you spend on the computer or if you use your hands excessively for other jobs or hobbies such as carpentry work, golf, or other sports activities.

3. Make the doctor examine you!

If you bring your guitar and you find a doctor who plays, the likelihood is that they will take the time to discover the source of your pain with a thorough examination. In my opinion, some doctors rely too heavily on what the x-ray, MRI, or CAT scan says and forgo even the most basic of physician examinations in lieu of the machine's findings. Many medical studies cite the difficulties in correctly diagnosing a musician's injury, often because the injury is to the "soft tissue," ligaments, tendons, and other connective tissues that do not show up well on these test results.

At our clinic we physically examine the patient, being careful to gently press on the area suspected to be causing pain. When the physician's touch elicits an intense pain spot (known as a "trigger" or tender point), this is the spot we know needs to be treated. But it may not be the only point! This is why a complete head-to-back and back-to-fingers examination is critical.

4. Avoid the "over-diagnosis" diagnosis.

Every wrist injury is not Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Certain strumming and fingering techniques—especially those that cause a rotation in the elbow—can cause excessive irritation and pain in the annular ligament, the connective tissue in the elbow that holds the two bones of our forearms together.

This "overuse" syndrome is most commonly diagnosed under the umbrella term "Tennis Elbow." It is important to have this ligament examined before a diagnosis of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is given because sometimes the pain in the annular ligament can refer down into the thumb, wrist, and index and middle fingers, mimicking and sometimes leading to an incorrect diagnosis of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is a compression of the median nerve at the wrist, leading to

numbness, tingling, and pain in the hand. The median nerve passes through the carpal tunnel at the wrist and into the palm, where it sends branches that control feeling to the thumb, index, middle, and half of the ring finger. Symptoms include tingling, pain, or numbness in the hand and fingers.

Traditional methods of treating carpal tunnel syndrome include wearing a splint at night or injections of cortisone to reduce swelling. If these measures are not successful, carpal tunnel release surgery (which sections the tough transverse carpal ligament and relieves pressure on the median nerve) may be performed. I cannot stress enough that in my opinion, a patient should never consent to surgery for CTS until an evaluation is performed by a physician trained in the referral patterns of pain in ligaments.

5. Don't give the doctor lip service nor blindly accept recommendations.

If the doctor says stop playing for a while, discuss the reasons for this recommendation. If you are a professional musician and this jeopardizes your livelihood, discuss other options that can be explored to allow you to continue playing on a lessened or reduced scheduled. This is another reason where seeking out a physician-musician would be of enormous benefit.

In summary: Don't be afraid to go to the doctor! It is safe to say that many musicians play through their pain and will only go to the doctor once the pain, numbness, or other symptoms make playing impossible. They avoid visiting the doctor for fear that the doctor will either tell them to stop playing or recommend a surgery that will make playing impossible for an extended period of time.

Obviously, it's best to visit the doctor before you are completely shut down. The doctor may be able to make simple recommendations that not only allow you to continue playing, but play with lessened or no pain!

Find the right doctor

As mentioned, in my opinion, just as it is most advantageous to seek a physician who plays, it is also advantageous to seek a physician who will first explore all methods of conservative care before recommending the most radical: surgical intervention. Find a physical pain specialist who is familiar with acupuncture, trigger point treatments, chiropractic, physical therapy, strengthening exercises, and (my personal treatment of choice) Prolotherapy, treatments that have a very good chance of alleviating your pain and allowing you to continue playing even through treatments.

(Prolotherapy is the natural stimulation of the body to produce collagen, repair overused or injured tissue, and rejuvenate the area or joint).

For more information, check Dr. Darrow's website http://www.jointrehab.com or phone 800-REHAB10. Dr. Darrow is an assistant clinical Professor at UCLA Medical School and is the Medical Director of Joint Rehab & Sports Medical Center in West Los Angeles. [Editor's note: Marc also plays guitar, banjo, mandolin, and, most recently, resonator guitar!]

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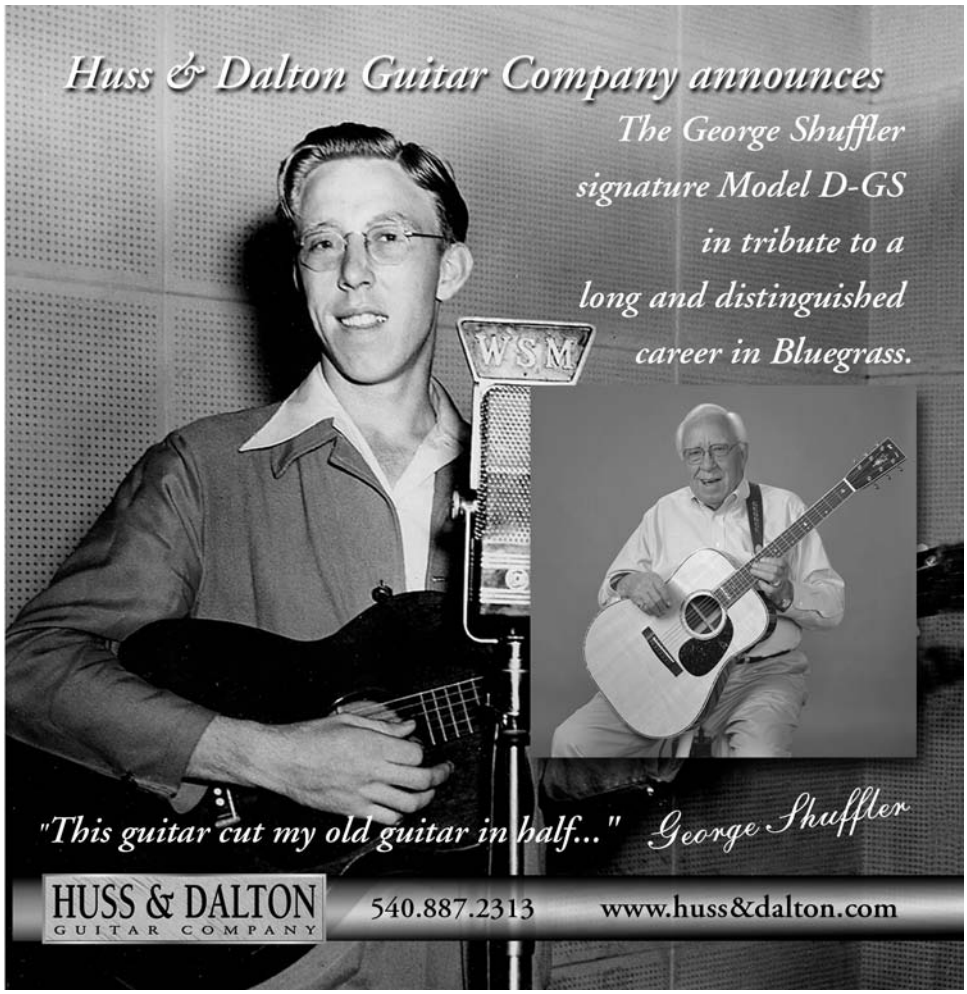
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Break Time

by Chris Jones

If you're a new reader to this column, I should explain that "Break Time" concerns itself—this may come as a shock—with guitar breaks, but with a special emphasis on breaks to songs, and it's particularly geared to guitar players playing in a band situation.

One topic that we really haven't focused on much in the past is the challenge a lead guitar player in a band faces when dealing with P.A. equipment. I don't mean the challenge of loading it, setting it up, and getting those deafening squeals out of the system; that's another topic for a different kind of column. I'm referring to the part that's your responsibility as a musician: "working" the microphone and getting the best sound you can for your guitar break.

Sound engineers will tell me (when we're on speaking terms) that they appreciate band members who know how to work their microphones. It makes their job a lot easier. These would be the sound people who know what they're doing with a bluegrass band (hereafter referred to as "the good ones"). There are less-desirable sound engineers ("the evil ones") and I'll touch on them later.

In order to keep this discussion focused, I will bypass the whole topic of pickups and pickup/mic combinations. We'll also avoid the issue of microphone brands, boom-stands, and foreign outsourcing of jobs in the manufacturing of windscreens. Instead we'll stay limited to the issues of playing guitar through a microphone.

In the majority of live bluegrass situations, guitar players are using a microphone only, and while this leads to the purest acoustic sound, it comes with some formidable challenges. In addition to the acoustic sound provided, the microphone is often preferred because it lends itself easily to the use of bluegrass dynamics. Instead of requiring a volume pedal or use of two lines of amplification, all you have to do is take a step forward or backward (without tripping on something) to achieve a change in volume.

The ability to increase your volume is critical in a bluegrass band situation, because when it comes time for you to switch from rhythm to a lead break, you will need extra volume, and relying on a sound engineer that you probably don't know to figure out that you need to be boosted right at that moment isn't going to work, unless the engineer is very skilled and/or a psychic. This is really **your** job.

What this means is that you need to allow yourself some distance between your guitar and microphone when you're playing rhythm, because if you don't, you'll have nowhere to go to get that "something extra" when your break comes around. This distance will vary based on the kind of mic being used and on your rhythm volume, but 4 to 10 inches from the mic is a common range. The added advantage of this is that you can also add dynamics to your rhythm playing too, moving in for bass runs or a little extra emphasis of your strum at the end of a phrase.

Chris Jones

New CD now available online at www.ChrisJonesBand.com

The new CD features live recordings of Chris from European tours spanning almost 20 years, with his band The Night Drivers, plus cuts from Weary Hearts, Whetstone Run, an all-star Czech bluegrass band and a bonus studio track with the Chris Jones Coalition.

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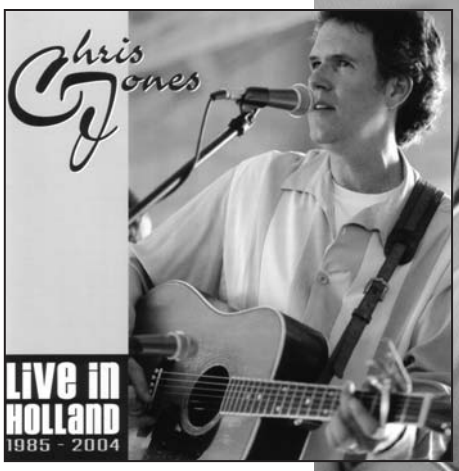

Live in Holland

A great time to practice this is during a soundcheck (if you get one), and you should make sure to set your rhythm level at the distance that also allows your breaks to be heard when you move forward.

Now some sound people ("the evil ones" alluded to above) don't have an understanding of bluegrass dynamics, or they have a goal of working the mics for all the band members so they have a lot of fader work to do during your show. They may feel this is necessary to either alleviate boredom and/or justify their existence. Whatever the motive, these people will often try to tell you to get up on the mic when playing rhythm, saying something like, "Of course you can't be heard! You need to be as close to the mic as possible!" implying that this is the first time in your life you've ever played on a microphone. Be polite, but firm about your wishes. (Being belligerent or disrespectful is never constructive and may lead to a silent guitar for your entire set.) Many will understand. Some will not, and they should be in a different line of work (lion taming?), but you need to accept that you've done your part, and then make the best of the situation.

A caution about sound checks: it's always best to avoid tricks to get the sound people to set your microphone hotter, such as playing more quietly than you normally would during the check, or staying further back from the mic than you plan to during the show. Leave that kind of deception to the mandolin player (I'm kidding, really I am!). Seriously, though, doing that can lead to sound imbalances, feedback, and eventually getting fired from your band, even if you own the van. Just make sure that you take a guitar break during the sound check, and be right on the mic when you do. If there are problems related to the boominess of your guitar (not at all unusual), they'll usually be discovered then. Then make sure that your rhythm playing is not too loud after that. That's an adjustment that you have to make at that point by gauging the proper distance from the microphone for rhythm.

As a final tip: for the coolest way to step into the mic for your guitar break, just watch Larry Sparks.

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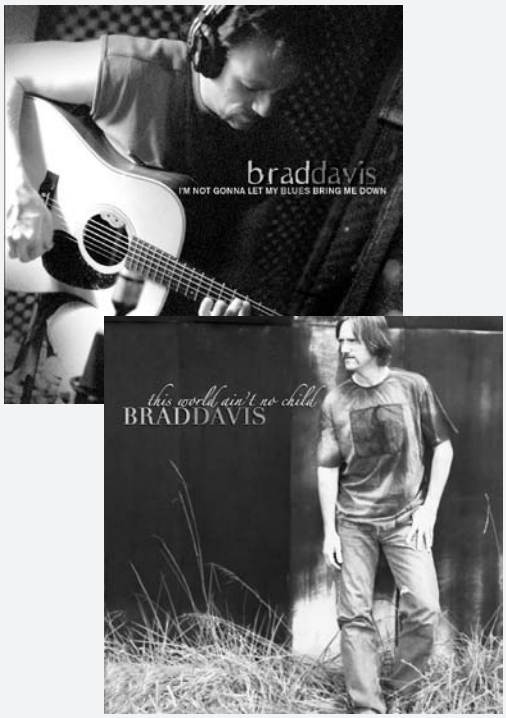

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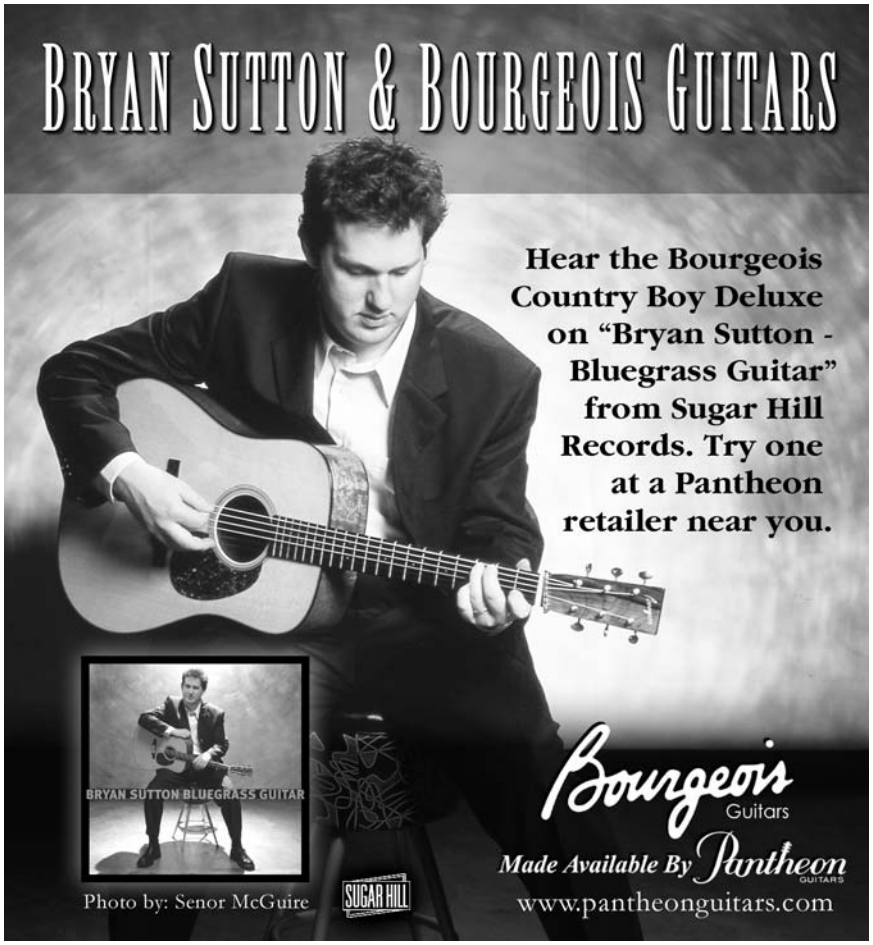
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Flatpick Profile:
Brandon Bentley

by Ryland Swain & William Lotts

Brandon Bentley embraces his favorite Henderson guitar tenderly and proceeds to coax from it a series of warm, clear, cascading notes. As he bends over the instrument, man and guitar seem to be united. He is 26 years old and did not begin to play until he was 19, but in the past three years he has won three major guitar contests and placed in a fourth. He gained first place awards in six other state and local contests. Through these contests and others throughout the country he has acquired two Henderson guitars, as well as a Gallagher, Martin, Bourgeois, and Taylor. Brandon has kept all these instruments, and also treasures the first guitar he ever played: a 60s Gibson J-50 that belonged to his grandfather, Pawpaw. It has laminated back and sides, but served him well until he bought an '83 D-35 at Fret and Fiddle in St. Albans, West Virginia, with which he won the 2001 Henderson festival. His prize that day was his beloved Henderson D-18, which is now his working guitar.

We met Brandon in 2003 at Allegheny Echoes, a summer music camp in Marlinton, West Virginia, run by Mike Bing and John Blisard, top musicians in the West Virginia music scene. We were quickly impressed by this friendly and genuinely nice, open young man who had a sincere desire to help any student who had a question and who also made such beautiful music. When we sat down with Brandon this winter to learn more about his journey, we heard an amazing story of a youth who had yearned for music all his growing up years but was hindered by lack of opportunity and resources. It is a story of a gifted youth who found the right teacher, mentor, and friend: Robin Kessinger. It is a story about finding and realizing his dreams despite deep nervousness and fears. That teacher, Robin Kessinger, says of him: "How would I describe Brandon in one sentence? He's a 50-year-old man trapped inside a 26-year-old body. Wise and experienced musician beyond his years."

Growing up in the tiny Lincoln County, West Virginia, coal mining town of McCorkle, Brandon didn't listen to the radio, but his dad liked bluegrass. "The first music in my life was from Dad listening to bluegrass and old country songs. My favorites were Jimmy Martin and Hank Williams. I always asked for an instrument but never had one. The record I remember most was Jimmy Martin—there were two records on a tape—the first half was some live stuff and also the *Widowmaker* album. I listened to those forever. I took the records and made them on tape."

"My Pawpaw had a guitar – he died when I was five. It's a Gibson, and I've still got it. It had 3 strings and a single-edged razor blade stuck through there; he was using it as a pick and I used it that way too. My Mawmaw years after he died (she couldn't play at all but she sang with him at church) had heart surgery and was laid up and showed me chords – C and G or D – then I put it down and didn't learn nothing else."

There was no link for Brandon on how to learn and no teacher who could inspire and give him the confidence to develop his gifts. School was a burden for him, and he wanted to drop out at age 14. "The truant officers made me come to their office in Hamlin, but I would say 'I ain't going to school, I hate it.'" His uncle lived nearby and knew the principal of the vocational school, and got Brandon to go to school and learn trades of welding and farming. "I ended up finishing school and graduated." Brandon then worked in construction and got in the Laborer's Local Union 1353 where contractors call to get laborers to construct buildings and roads. This has been his "day job" ever since. "Trying to make a living as a musician is like being on the Chet Atkins diet," Brandon says, "Eat with what money you make with your guitar, which means you starve to death."

"What really got me going on the guitar was my cousin Timmy Gillenwater. He played flatpicking style like Norman Blake and started showing me stuff when I was 19. He is a great mandolin, guitar, fiddle, and dulcimer player. We worked construction together; I'd ride to work with him. He had an old Chevette and played bluegrass and flatpicking tapes. One day he put in the Steve Kaufman and Robin Kessinger CD, *Star of the County Down*, and he talked about Robin. I was really struck by that CD and that style of picking. That really got me—the feeling Robin plays with. The greatest thing that ever happened to me was meeting Robin."

"One evening Timmy had to play a square dance with Robin and a fiddler, Joe Dobbs. I didn't want to go – but he dragged me out and then I heard Robin and got obsessed with learning how to flatpick. Every three months, I was so backward, I would go to the square dance when Robin was there and just sit there and watch him play the guitar. Then I met him and started getting some lessons. I got obsessed with it. I was so dadgone fortunate to live so close to Robin. I just practiced whatever he showed me perfectly, slow. I had in my mind I was going to learn. I was awkward with my right hand, but I made my mind up to do that perfect. I didn't worry about the left hand as much as the right hand. Then I'd go back with Robin and try to play the song. I just liked the songs, and mainly learned from Robin. I played his stuff, but he didn't confine me to learning just his tunes. This was in 1998; Robin was big friends with Steve Kaufman and they were doing work together—he got me interested in Steve Kaufman, and I bought a couple of his books. This was what got me on tablature. I bought some of his records and tried to learn as much as I could off of Steve Kaufman's CDs."

Robin told us, "After Brandon had been taking lessons from me for some time, I told him he needed to be listening to other musicians and don't just use my stuff. I told him, 'there's already one Robin Kessinger, now we need a Brandon Bentley.' That's the thing. That was a lesson passed down from my Uncle Clark Kessinger and my dad, Bob. Both of them told me if I wanted to be

as good as they were, I was going to have to listen to other musicians, or even other instruments, to get some of my own musical ideas. That's exactly what Mr. Brandon Bentley has done."

At first Brandon strung up and used his old Gibson. Butch Barker gave him a tortoise shell pick at Galax. He was going to festivals and seeing Martins and says everybody kept telling him he should have a Martin, and so he bought his D-35. "I was working out of the Union Hall 10 hours a day, and had too much money for a kid; I bought that Martin for $1,200." Robin pushed him to increase his speed, and he tried to play cleanly. By "clean," Brandon means letting the notes ring without being slurred or muffled. He also began to hear the beauty of holding down notes as long as you can. Robin comments that it is so rare for a student to listen to every detail on how to improve their playing. "Brandon not only listened from a technical point of view but paid attention when I warned him about some problems that he might have later on and how to avoid them. I would tell him things like 'don't get discouraged when you hit that two-year rut (that's when you feel like you ain't getting better), that just means you're thinking about all the stuff you learned and your brain is resting. Keep picking and it will pass.'"

Brandon recalls, "Timmy [Gillenwater] went to contests all over the country. Timmy didn't have a car that would make the trip and he wanted me to drive him. About a month after I started taking lessons from Robin we went to Clarksville, Tennessee, the Tennessee State Flatpicking Contest." Cody Kilby placed first and Adam Wright second. Brandon only knew three tunes at that point, but he met Adam that night, and he was "really nice and about my same age." Later that year Brandon also met Adam's teacher, Rob Pearcy, at the Leitchfield, Kentucky, State Contest. Both have been encouraging to him.

Timmy was urging Brandon to enter contests. The first competition he entered was in May 1998 at the Vandalia Gathering in Charleston, West Virginia. "I was really scared," he said, "but Timmy made me do it. I had just learned 'Beaumont Rag'; I was a beginner and never played on a microphone before. We drew numbers: I drew 15, Robert Shafter drew 14, Johnny Staats was 16, and Robin was 17. I didn't want to do it, Timmy said 'just go on!' Robert won, and I got last place, easily. Got on that microphone, started out good, but almost ready to throw up. Soon as I started playing the monitor came on and I thought I sounded good—and I got lost and wasn't experienced enough to get out of it. It seemed like maybe 30 or 40 seconds went by and I didn't play a note. Timmy was playing rhythm and afterwards some friends of his wife said 'boy, that sounded good.' The point is that contests are a good way to build your nerves up. You probably sound better than you think."

Brandon continues, "It just so happened the following Friday after the contest Robin and them were playing a square dance and Robin invited me to sit behind him and he said 'nobody will hear you and every time I take a break you take one too.' He said, 'don't worry, you won't throw me off.' It turned out to be one of the best things anybody ever did to help me improve my playing. I had quit playing—but after I played with Robin I felt like I could do it—well, if Robin wants me to sit with him then I can do this. It was like playing with a metronome or something. I just kinda got myself put back together and kept doing those contests."

The next weekend Brandon played at Bob Evans Farm in Rio Grande, Ohio, but didn't place. "Got last place out of a field of 8 or 9. I've got a lot of last places, didn't let it discourage me. A couple of weeks later we went to the Indiana State contest, and then to Kentucky State, where Timmy played in the guitar and mandolin contests. I had started trying to play the mandolin, and there I got last place in guitar and mandolin. Timmy got third in mandolin and fourth in guitar. I met Adam Wright there again and he picked two hours with me and showed me stuff. When I got home, Adam called me and talked to me long distance for about an hour on how to improve my contest playing. He said, 'Play cleanly and close to the melody and don't try to be a speed demon.' I try to keep this in mind. Then we played some smaller contests in Ohio, and I got second in a couple, and that felt better. That year I drove all over the Southeastern US with Timmy. In contest after contest, I drew a number just behind Cody Kilby. I listened to his 'Washington County' and 'Greensleeves' so many times that I knew them. Playing after Cody is one scary place to have to play in a contest. He is such a powerful player and a genius at contests. I did a version of 'Greensleeves' that year that I picked up off of Cody."

"The next big person I met was Robert Shafer. Adam asked me if I knew Robert Shafer, said 'he lives in Charleston.' I started looking for him—when I first entered the contest at the Vandalia Gathering he was doing a set with Darel Meadows; the person who won the contest the year before does a set the next year. They played 'I Don't Love Nobody,' 'Westphalia Waltz,' and 'Sweet Georgia Brown.' Then Robert played 'Cotton Patch Rag' and 'Bill Bailey' in the contest, which he won, and it was a life-changing experience for me. What was neat about hearing him is that he has his own way of playing. It was different from everybody else; it was so tasteful. I didn't meet him for another year."

When Brandon did meet Robert he took lessons with him as well as with Robin, and Robert became another friend and mentor. "Robert is one of the nicest, most sharing people I have ever met." The recording of "Bill Cheatham" that Brandon made for this issue of FGM was made in Robert's studio.

"During the winter, I got laid off. I was staying with my Mawmaw. She had had a stroke and somebody had to sit there with her all the time, she was bed fast. I just sat there and practiced all the time. I'd stayed with her since I was a kid—it's where I live now. She died in January 2001, on the 13th. She laid there a couple of years in the bed helpless and during that time I didn't go anywhere and I just sat there with her and played my guitar. Did that all winter 1999 and 2000, and when I was working, me and my aunt took turns with her and I would just practice. I was still taking lessons with Robin off and on and he took me to gigs with him and it was real good for me. Instead of hiring somebody real good he would take you out and train you—kind of like an apprentice—and he'd pay you half. This was good for the student but probably was a sacrifice of the sound for him. He also got me to go to Allegheny Echoes in 1998. I

was with him a whole week and I felt I was a lot better when I got back. I got to meet a lot of folks and to pick a lot. I was in a class with Penny Kilby and she was fussing at me about smoking. I was bad about smoking as a kid and chewing, but after learning to play guitar, I stopped smoking. Got into a more healthy way because I had something I liked to do."

"In the spring of 2000, Timmy and I went to Merlefest. I was good friends with Adam and he told me about it and the contest there. It was Robert Shafer, Adam Wright, and Fred Duggin in the finals, and Adam won. Andy Leftwich, who plays fiddle now with Ricky Skaggs, won mandolin that year. This opened me up to bigger contests; it is a whole different level of competition. I also heard lots of bands and heard Doc for the first time. Then I didn't enter contests much until the fall of 2000, when I took the first gold at Roscoe Village, in Coshocton, Ohio, at the Wildwood Music Store. I got $100 and was added to the plaque with some distinguished pickers, Timmy's daughter, Hannah Gillenwater, got third place. She is a great flatpicker."

"In the spring of 2001 at Vandalia I got third place behind Robert and Robin, and had won the Mocksville Fiddle Convention contest in North Carolina a few weeks before that. The Monday before Vandalia I fell through a roof we were working on and pulled my shoulder out of place. Had to work at getting my arm around the guitar, but played in the contest."

"I went to Bob Evans Farm again with Robin that year, and Robin took first place, and I was second. It was the first time I played a Henderson guitar, because I used Robin's Henderson to back him up in the mandolin contest. I fell in love with that D-18, and told Robin I wanted one. He said, 'go win one!' Two weeks later, I went to the Wayne Henderson Festival in Grayson Highlands Park, and won first place."

"The day before the festival, it was very hot, 98 degrees, and I was pouring footers. I busted the middle finger on my left hand with a sledge hammer. I came home and poured a driveway, working until about midnight that night. I got up at 3 a.m. to drive to the festival, alone. I put two tubes of superglue on my finger, which was very sore, and played that way. At one point, the glue was coming loose and got caught between the strings. I just kept playing. I was so tickled about winning that I drove back home that night to tell everybody and I didn't know about going down to Rugby to Wayne's house to play music—I didn't know where that was. The next year I was a judge and camped out on Wayne's front yard with Robin; a big wind almost blew us away. I am a real fan of Wayne's music and of him—he's real hospitable and funny and he makes great omelets."

"In spring 2002, I won the Vandalia contest for the first time. Robin was very proud and pleased for me. In 2003, I won Kentucky State and Indiana State, and won Vandalia. I entered the Merlefest contest, but didn't place; I got hammered by Steve Lewis. In 2004, I went with a more aggressive approach. I won first place and went home with a Gallagher. Pat Flynn was a judge, and that scared me. But you never beat anybody, the judges just happen to like your version of the tune on a particular day. The trick is being different."

"In the fall of 2003, I went to Winfield for the first time and placed in the top five. Also in 2003, I went to the Ossippee Valley Bluegrass Festival in Cornish, Maine. I took second place, with Lincoln Meyers taking first. I got a Martin DM, and met Steve Kaufman for the first time. He was a judge and I saw him sitting there right in front of me and I was real scared. But he was very kind to me later and gave me a nice compliment." Next year in Ossippee, I took first place and won a Professional series Bourgeois."

"In the fall of 2004, I placed third at Winfield and came home with a Taylor guitar. I played 'Bill Cheatham,' the version that you'll hear on the recording with the magazine. But there's always the come-down, because after Winfield I went to a festival in Hiawassee, Georgia, one of the most beautiful places I've been, and didn't even place. Earlier that year at Renofest in South Carolina, I took first place and got another Henderson—a D-28, which is a beautiful guitar, the craftsmanship is wonderful. Also last fall, I went up to Nashville for the contest there and came off with second place and $1,000. Steve Lewis won; he hammered me again. You had to draw a tune to play with a vocalist, and I drew 'John Hardy' in F and had 30 minutes to learn it. Steve drew 'Nine Pound Hammer,' and he hammered it good. I played 'Bill Cheatham' and 'Wild Fiddler's Rag,' a tune off of Mark O'Conner's *Sopping the Gravy* album. Robin played this tune to win Winfield in 1985."

Right now, Brandon is enjoying teaching at Nitro Music Store in Nitro, West Virginia, and is challenged to find ways to break down the material for his students so they can understand it. "Sometimes I go too fast; I get excited and I go too fast." He finds the young kids he teaches to be "ornery," but "it's so funny what six-year-olds say." He taught intermediate guitar at Allegheny Echoes last summer, and will teach there again this year. In learning to do tablature, he looked at the tabs in *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* for guidance. His goal for his music, other than training for Winfield, is to "have fun, meet new people, and help somebody learn if I can." He was very impressed by Norman and Nancy Blake whom he saw at a festival in New York: "I respected that he walked around the festival almost all day, and showed, talked about, and helped with anything anybody asked him." That is Brandon's style: he is eager to help budding musicians in the way that others have helped him. His advice is "when it feels like you're not going to get where you want to be and get knocked down, just pick yourself up and go on." What is of most importance to him is the feeling of the music: "One note with feeling is worth a whole string of notes without it."

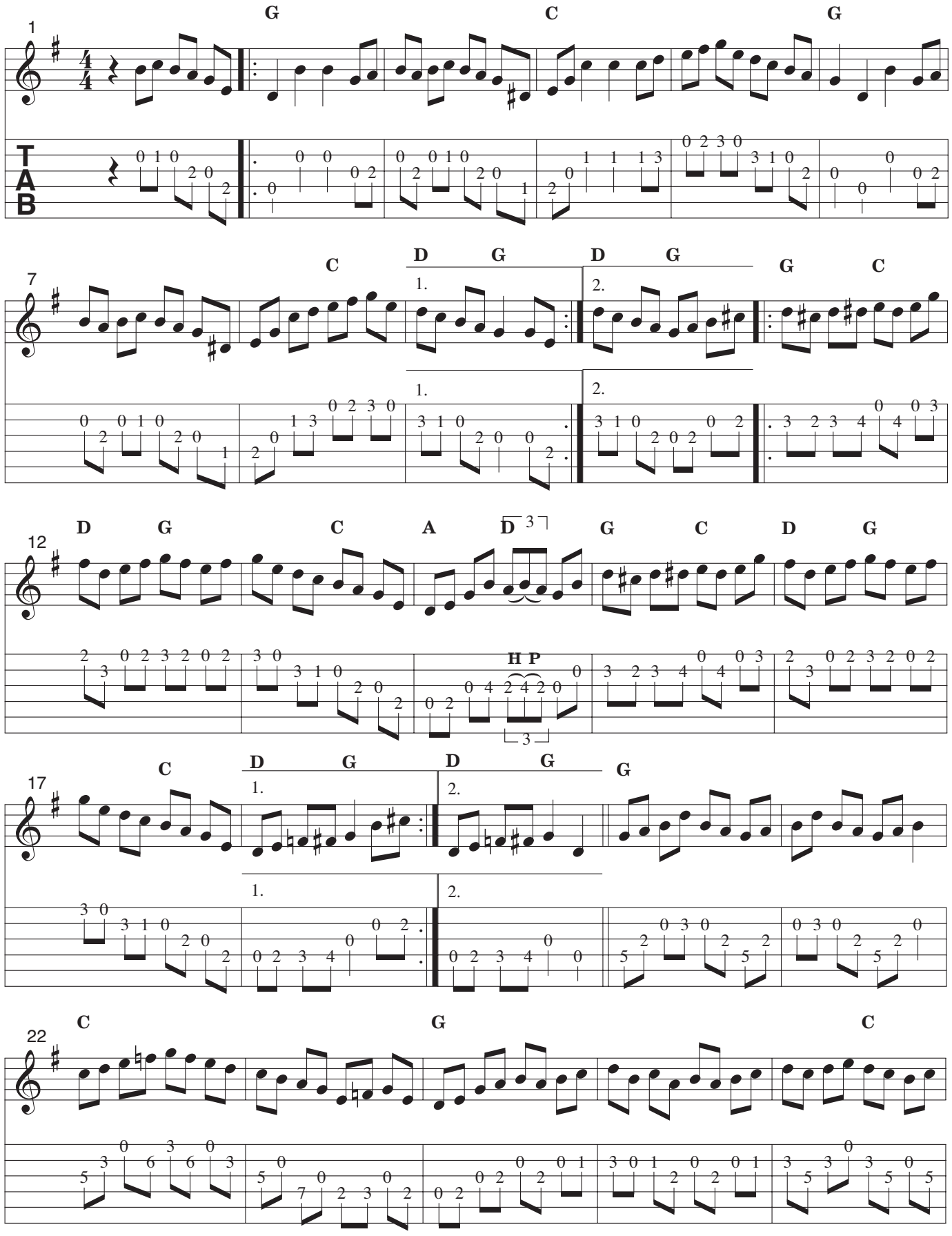
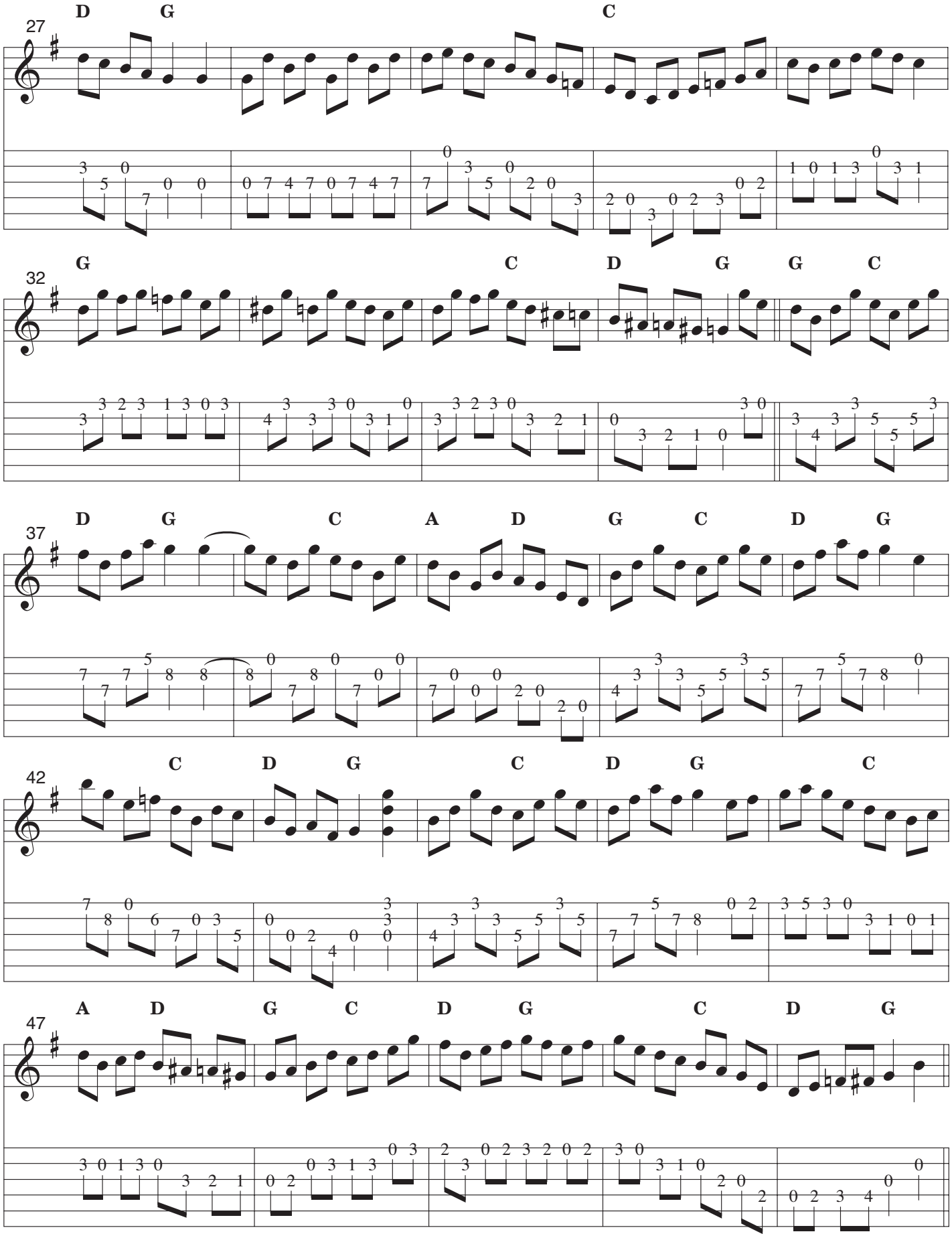
Robin Kessinger says, "I feel like Brandon is one of my success stories not only because of his winning many flatpicking contests around the country but because of his teaching ability too. In the short time he's been teaching, he's turned out some pretty good student pickers. He's a pleasure to be around and is always quick to show someone some new trick he's picked up somewhere." Robin is impressed with Brandon's quick learning, and also the compassion and humility he has for others. "Knowing that Brandon took care of his grandmother when she got Alzheimer's disease has always pulled at my heart. I just can't think of any young men in their early twenties who would resign themselves to that. I think he's one of the most unselfish human beings in the world."

The music Brandon likes now—other than Robin, Robert, and Steve Kaufman—comes from Tim Stafford, Kenny Smith, David Grier, jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli, and others, and interestingly, Mozart and Bach. He gets inspiration from these classical masters. "There is something to learn from everybody." He likes DR Phosphor Bronze medium strings, or D'Addario Phosphor Bronze; "I like the sound." He ran over the tortoise shell pick with his truck and cracked it, and now he likes Wegen picks, because "you can get another if you lose it." He still uses a tuner that his mother picked up at a yard sale, a Wittner GT 2, and a Shubb capo.

Brandon and Robin are taking a southern tour this summer and Robin hopes that the folks in Mississippi will be able to get to hear them. He says, "I'm sure Brandon will keep me laughing all the way."

Audio CD
Track 17

Bill Cheatum

Arranged by
Brandon Bentley

Bill Cheatum (con't)

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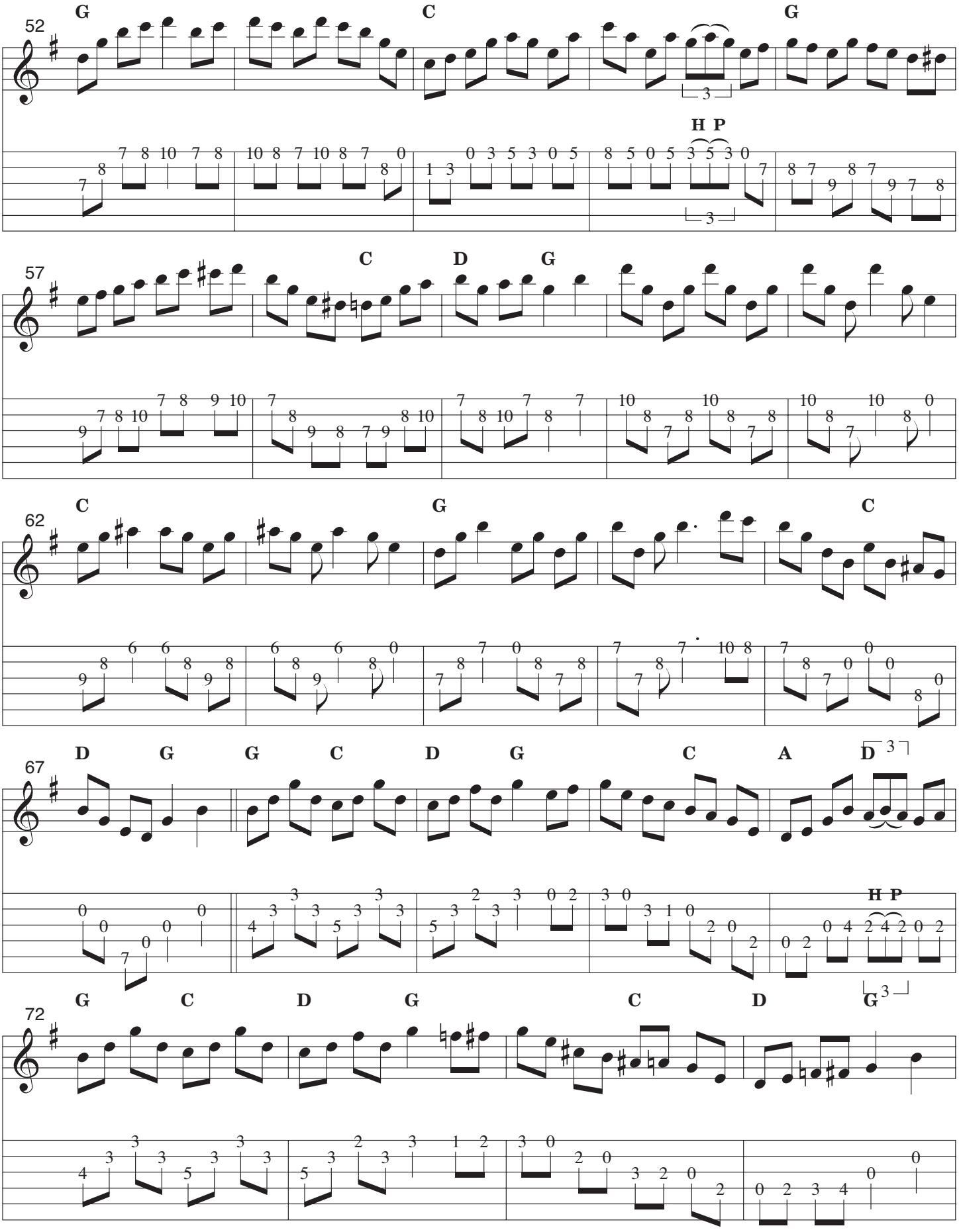
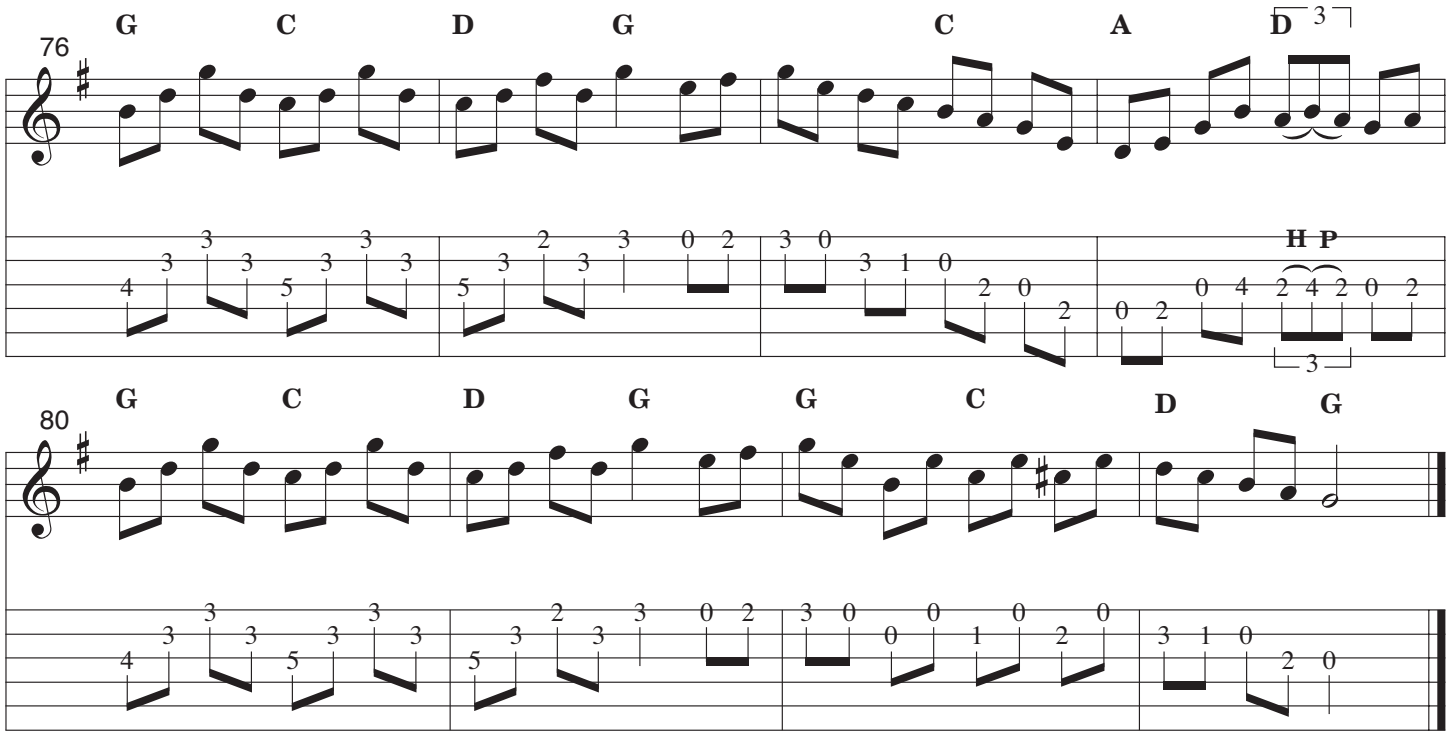
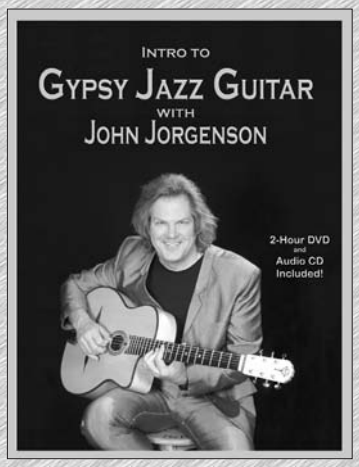

Bill Cheatum (con't)



New from *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine!*

Intro to Gypsy Jazz Guitar with John Jorgenson



In this first of three volumes of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine's* new Gypsy Jazz Guitar instructional series John Jorgenson has designed and presented one of the most complete acoustic guitar instructional methods available on the market today. Each volume of this three-part series includes a 2-hour instructional DVD, an audio CD with practice audio tracks, and a full format book which presents all of the theoretical information, chord charts, fret board diagrams, music notation, and tablature for the material presented on the DVD.

In this first volume ***Intro to Gypsy Jazz Guitar***, Jorgenson provides the foundational information and practice material necessary for you to gain an understanding of the Gypsy jazz guitar style. The first half of this volume addresses the important element of Gypsy jazz rhythm. After discussing correct right hand rhythm technique, Jorgenson teaches the closed chord forms of a basic blues progression and then systematically introduces new chords into that progression to add "color" and "spice" while also introducing you to the characteristic "moving chord" style of Gypsy rhythm. After addressing the basic blues progression, Jorgenson then transitions into the more Gypsy sounding minor blues progression and introduces the "three-note" chords which are prominent in Gypsy style rhythm guitar.

The second half of this first volume addresses soloing. Here Jorgenson not only lays the groundwork of Gypsy jazz soloing, but in the process also presents you with a method which serves to greatly enhance your understanding of the fingerboard and improvisational playing. Jorgenson teaches arpeggios, note maps, lead patterns, and Gypsy techniques in every area of the fingerboard and in various keys. Additionally, he masterfully shows how the arpeggios and patterns relate to one another.

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NASHVILLE FLATTOP

By Brad Davis

CHICKEN PICKIN' FLATPICKIN'

The term chicken pickin' has usually been associated with electric guitar players. It is a style made famous by Albert Lee, Jimmy Bryant, Ray Flacke, and Clarence White just to name a few. Clarence also did it on the acoustic guitar and thus set a precident for us modern day flatpickers. To create the sound of chicken pickin' you will use your first finger and thumb to hold your flatpick and your index and ring finger will team up, so to speek, to pick two strings at the same time. There will also be times, however, when the index finger will pick a string by itself. The tab shows when and where these fingers come into play. Make sure you know the note map of this transcription with your left hand and then start stabbing at the right hand. This technique can be added sparingly to a solo to spice it up and create a challenge for you. Good luck and have fun with this chicken pickin'. If you'd like to see this technique up close, a short video clip of me chicken pickin' can be viewed at:

www.flatpickteacher.com

Feel free to shoot me an email if you have any questions at:

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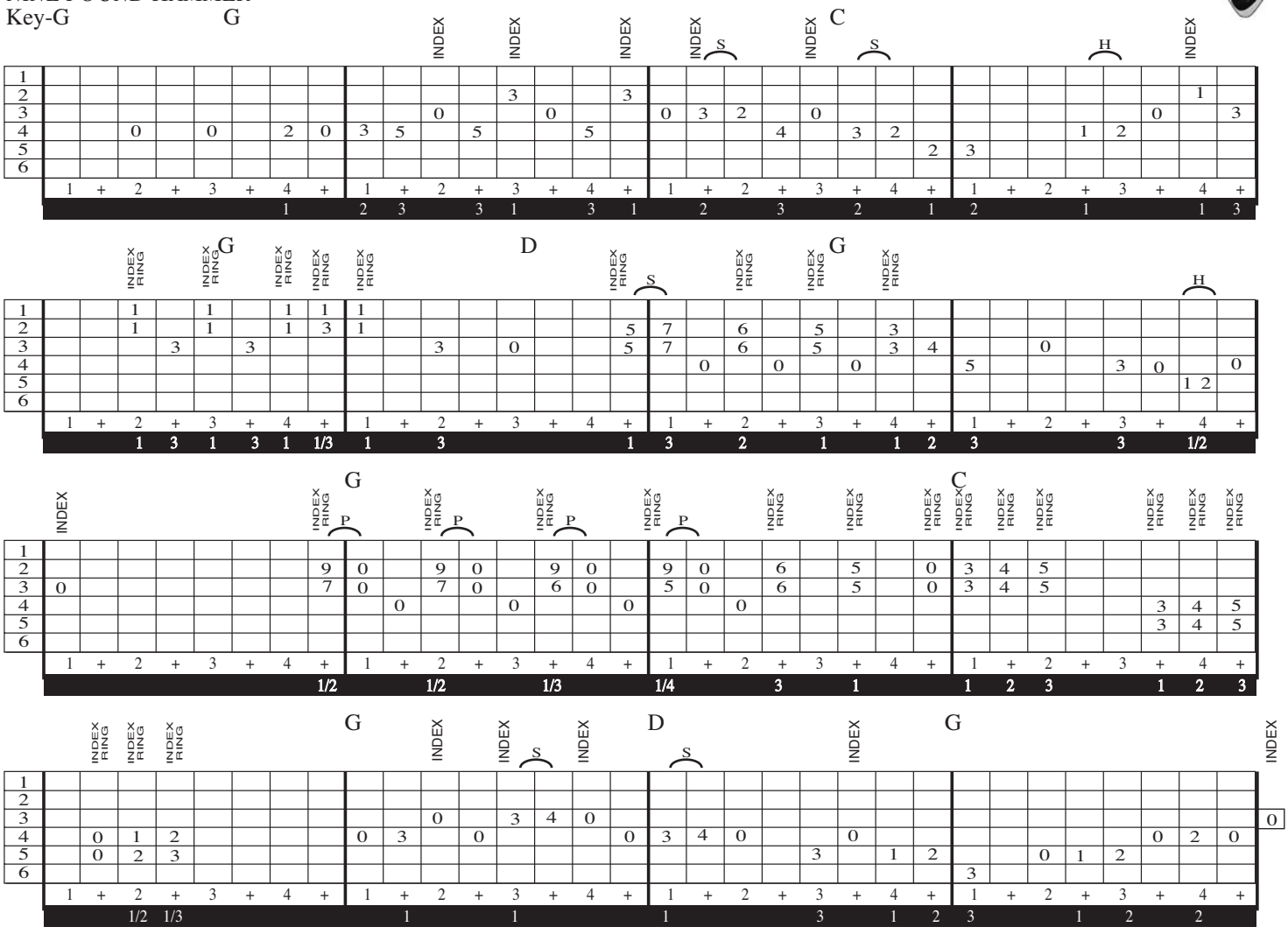
www.fgmrecords.com

Audio CD
Tracks 19 & 20

NINE POUND HAMMER

Key-G



Gypsy Jazz Guitar

by Paul Mehling

Minor Swing: Part 3

Continuing our study of Django Reinhardt's 1937 masterpiece solo on his tune "Minor Swing" finds us at measure 8 (part 1 was rhythm, part 2 the first 8 measures), where we've just completed a little gliss from a C to an A, a perfect little phrase that nicely closes the first 8 bars and is a reminder to our ears that we're in the key of A minor. (An A minor chord is made up of the notes A-C-E and since the one-string gliss here is a C down to A, the only note missing to complete the chord is the note E.)

The chord now is a D minor; we've moved into the second half of the song form. (Song form is A/B, which means the A section is usually 8 bars and the B section is 8 bars. It's a very short form, but one that is easy to jam on!) The solo starts with a scale-like walk up from A (the main note of the A minor chord we've just left) to the D (the note of the chord we're currently on) then an *appoggiatura* (or a trill and a pull-off around a note—here the note in the middle is B, the sixth of D minor, a very pungent note that makes Gypsy jazz so distinctive) around the B, and onto **yet again** another arpeggio, now a D minor triad (A-F-D). A simple chromatic (half step/one fret) link from the D to Db to C puts us back on an A minor chord, with a little further closure (in music this is often called resolution) around the F note of the D minor triad, resolving the F to an E which will be the 5th of the A minor (a note we've not heard too much of yet in this solo, partially to build suspense until we get to the inevitable V chord, E7).

All music—blues, bluegrass, rock, jazz, and classical—has V chords. In fact, all music is basically resolutions between some sort of V chord and some sort of I chord. I is the home base or tonic chord, the key of the piece. V is five steps away from the home. For example, in the key of C, I is C and V is G; in the key of A minor, I is A and V is E.

After resolving the F to E problem with a tasty little trill, Django makes one more little concession to resolving the cadence (or harmonic movement) with a little fake-out of an A minor triad from that E to a C. But before he gets to the A to finish the A minor triad he takes a little detour to a G# below the A and then quickly resolves up a fret (a half-step) to the A. Simple and effective!

Further underscoring the tonality of A minor (so the listener has no doubt about the key of the piece and the darkness therein) Django sweeps upward from the A through a very simple but effective A minor arpeggio (conveniently for us, it's a very familiar chord shape to play!) He walks up to a high C then goes down to that same G#, this time an octave higher, and stops on the B just below the high C. He's clearly **telling** us that we've arrived at E7 without even giving us an E note. By playing the G# and the B he's *implied* the E without totally spoiling the punch line. Again, this kind of trickery is the sign of a master. How many of us would have simply played an E on an E7 chord??!!

The solo continues its unwrapping of the E7 chord with a return to the pungent F# (the sixth of A minor. the key we're in) to set up yet another appoggiatura (the combination of a half-step trill above the central note and a whole-step pull-off below the central note, usually returning to the central note) landing on the G# again, then sliding down from E to Eb to D (as we did previously from D to Db to C, but this time it's the same movement only played a whole-step higher!). Then four more notes which can be taken as either half-step above the chord tones of E7 (C to B, then A to G#) or as a segment of a diminished scale—something that jazz musicians were not to "discover" until the 1940s. Clearly, Django was ahead of the curve on harmony! (Diminished arpeggio is a series of minor 3rds or one note every 4 frets. Diminished Scale is a pattern of/half-step/whole-step or 1fret/2frets etc.) One last B note before the section closes on an A minor arpeggio – this time played from top to bottom. That's the end of the first of four choruses!

If this analysis seems too mathematical or scholarly, don't despair! If you learn the solo and simply look at how the notes relate to the chords (you may need to expand your visualizations of chords by recombining the notes into different chord shapes), you'll see these relationships. You may have your own explanations about what is going on—the magic is in the sound, analyzing the way to reproduce the sound is just a way of unlocking the secrets to gain insight into your own way of playing this music.

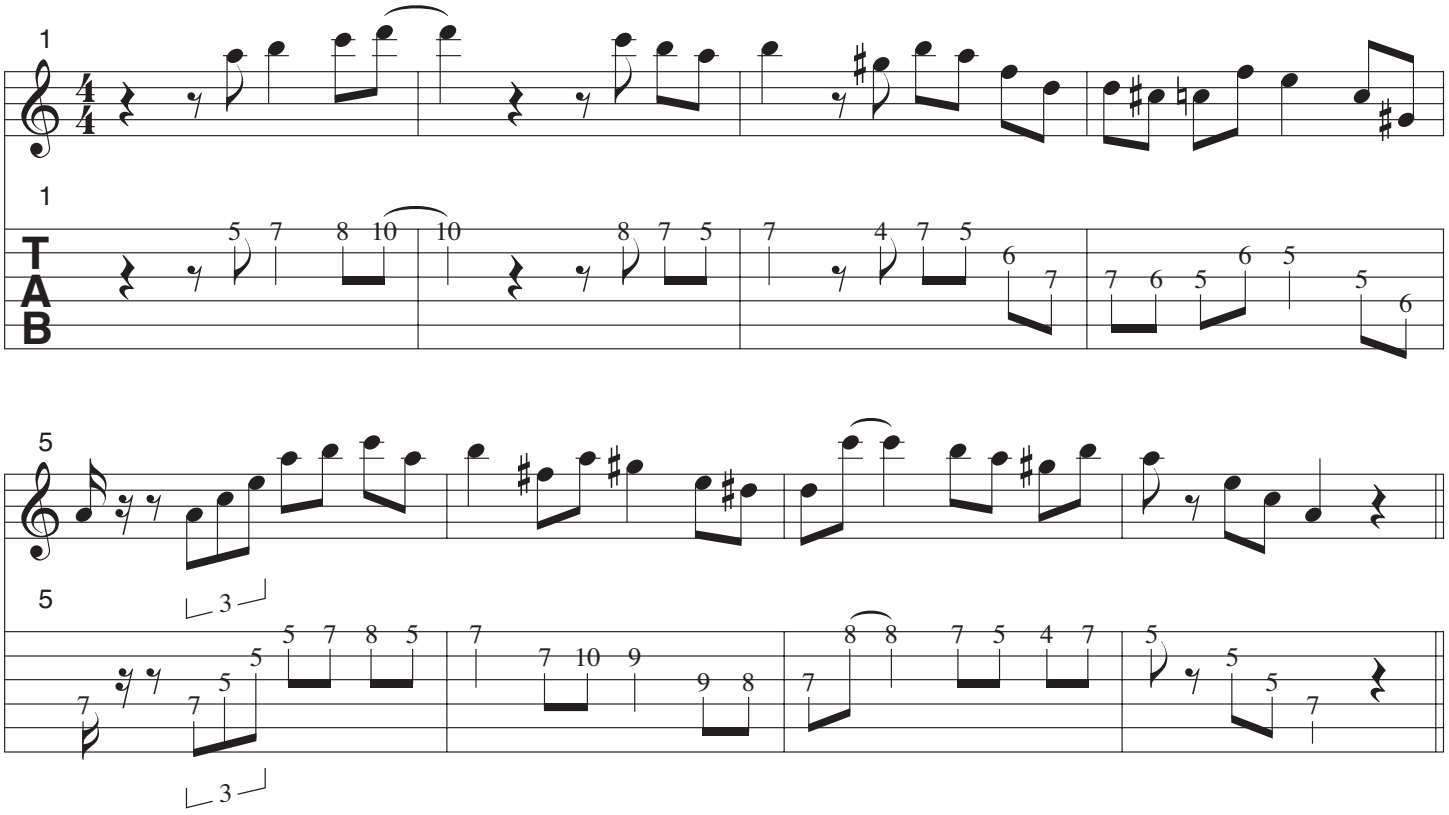
Currently, there are an ever-increasing number of non-Gypsies (gadzjos) playing this music, yet we haven't seen a distinct "school" of playing that builds upon these principles. That style or school has yet to emerge; all of you who learn these solos will be part of the growth of this genre. Good luck—have fun!

Next time we'll continue with the second chorus of this great solo. In the meantime, play this much and really hear the chord changes underneath the solo. It's a story he's weaving for us and though we may have heard it a million times, we love to hear him tell it over and over.

Paul Mehling (aka Pazzo) is the leader of the notorious Hot Club of San Francisco, with 9 CDs in 13 years and constant appearances all over the planet. On the music scene in northern California all his life, his dedication to jazz, especially Gypsy Swing has in some small way, hopefully, made the world a safer place for music. *www.HCSF.com*

Audio CD
Track 21

Minor Swing
(second section)

Arranged by
Django Reinhardt

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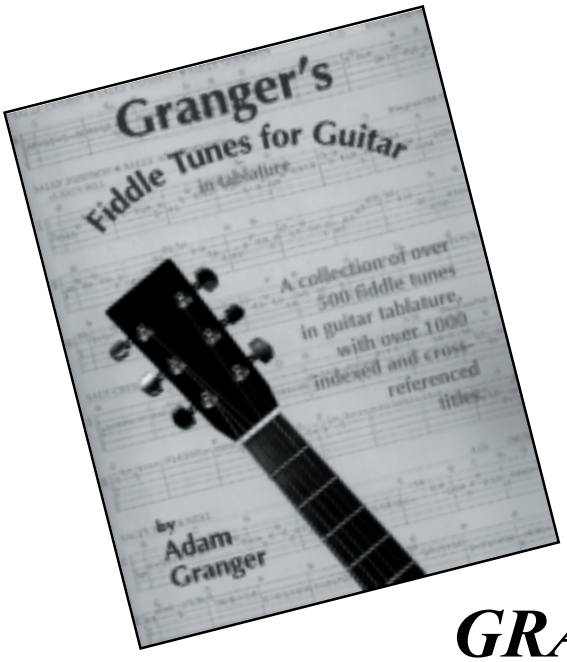
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THE O-ZONE

by Orrin Star

Pointe au Pic

Named for a small town on the St. Lawrence River northeast of Quebec City, "Pointe au Pic" (pweht o peek) is a rollicking French-Canadian reel that is played at contra dances all across the USA. I decided to learn it a couple of weeks ago when it spoke to me at a Maryland dance I partook of.

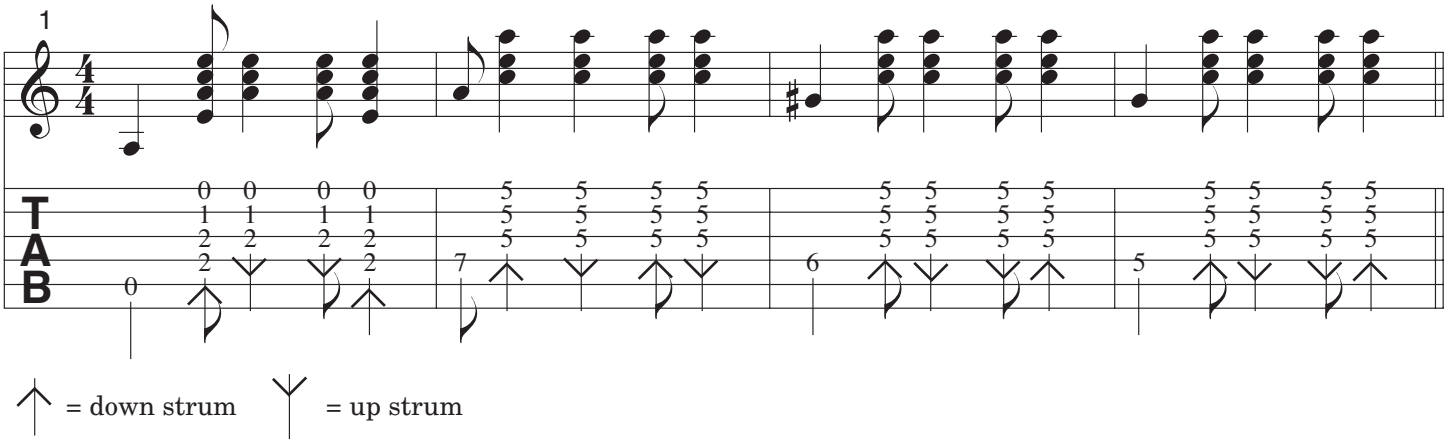
There's something cinematic and magical about this tune. As with many rags and reels, each section is double the size of a standard AABB tune and so it is played simply AB. And each part has its own personality: the A is bouncy and rag-like; the B, minor and brooding. And they both take you on a journey. By the time you finish each part you really feel as though you've been somewhere.

Contributing to this epic feel is a rhythm part that's kind of a halfway house between Texas back-up and regular rhythm. (In particular, there's a very cool descending line on the Am chords, which is shown below.)

And since there's nothing like hearing a tune, let me direct those of you with Internet access to www.cdbaby.com/cd/phantomp, where you can hear an authentic contra dance fiddle and piano rendition by Lissa Schneckenburger and Bruce Rosen (which was my source for learning this one).

Orrin Star is an award-winning guitar, banjo and mandolin player who now lives and teaches in the Washington, DC area. The 1976 National Flatpicking Champion, he has toured and recorded widely, is the author of Hot Licks for Bluegrass Guitar and now performs mostly solo and in a duo with Jimmy Gaudreau. See www.orrinstar.com.

Am Rhythm Riff:



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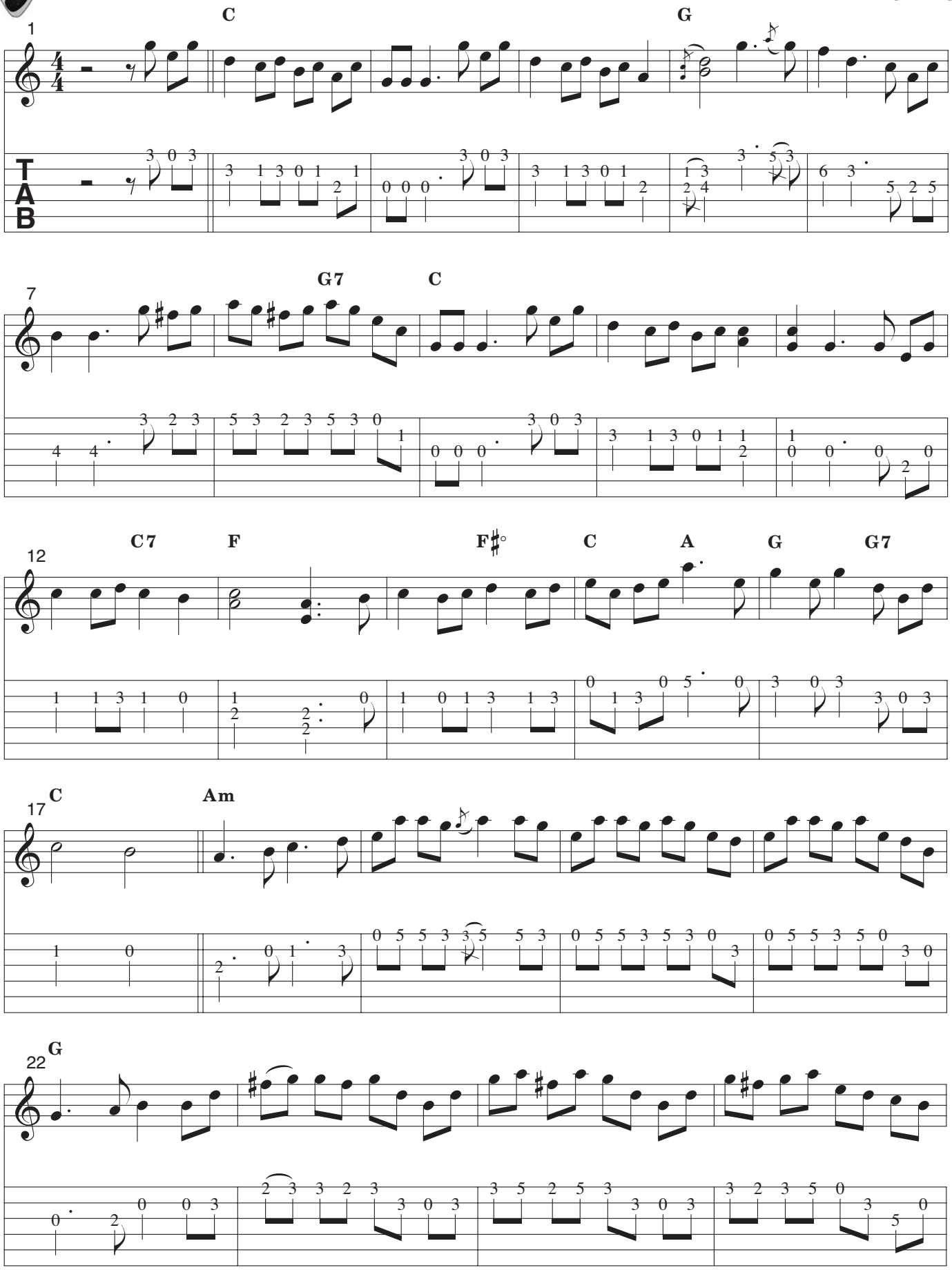
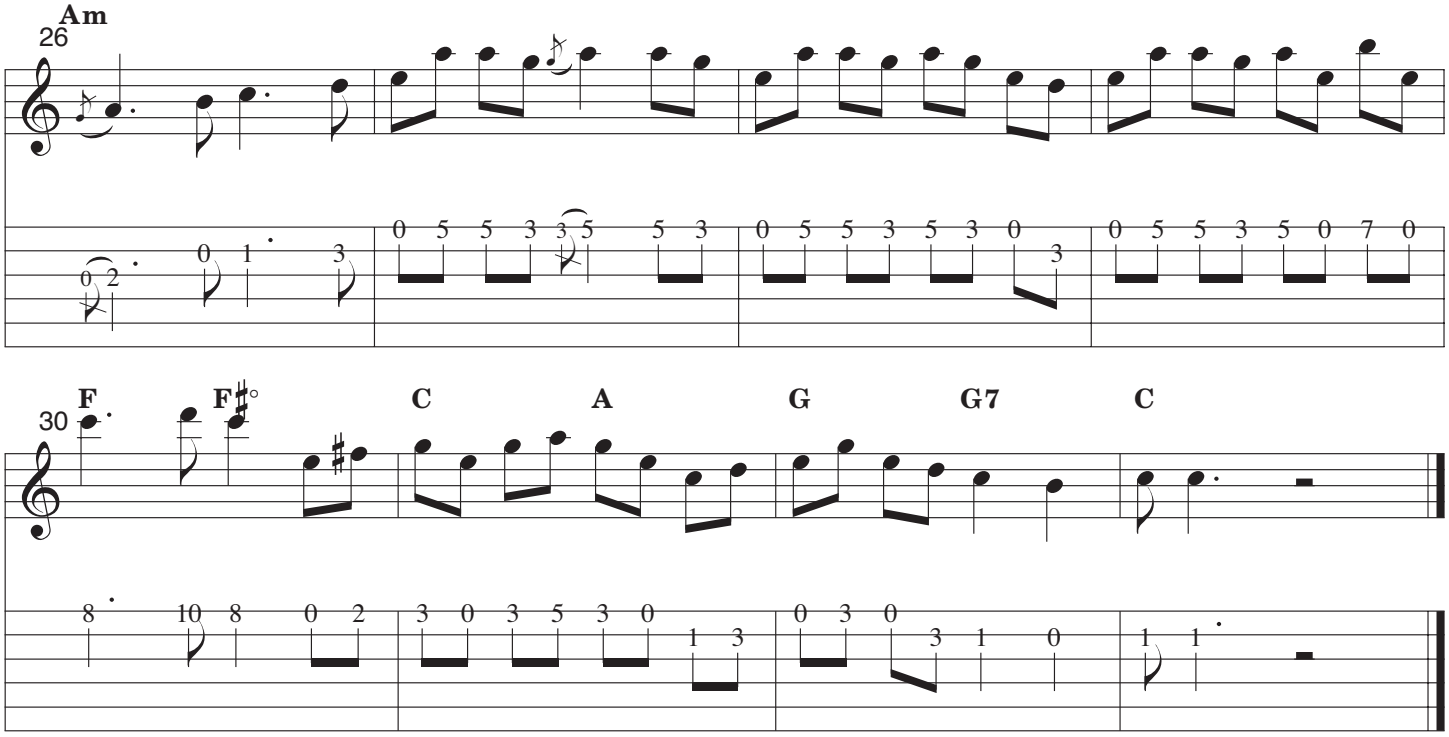
Audio CD
Tracks 22-23

Pointe au Pic

Arranged by
Orrin Star

Pointe au Pic (con't)



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Brad Davis:

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Brad Davis brings his acoustic guitar and songwriting talent to the forefront with the release of his new solo recording *I'm Not Gonna Let My Blues Bring Me Down*. Speical guests include: **Earl Scruggs, Billy Bob Thornton, Sam Bush, David Grier, Rob Ickes, Greg Davis, Tommy Shaw, John Jorgenson, Jon Randall, Glen Duncan, and Kelly Nolf**

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Going up the Neck with the Carter Style

Welcome to the third installment of "Moving Up The Neck." In the first article we looked at an up-the-neck version of "Forked Deer" in D. This version was based on a couple of up-the-neck D scales that I encouraged you to learn. In the second article we looked at "Arkansas Traveler," still in D, but based around a D chord shape. My purpose in presenting these two arrangements was to demonstrate two different approaches to arranging tunes up-the-neck, one based on scales and the other based on chord shapes.

After we published the "Forked Deer" column I got a note from a reader who wanted to learn how to play solos to bluegrass vocal songs (not fiddle tunes) up-the-neck using chord shapes. She wanted to learn these up-the-neck chords so that she would "be able to throw in chords when I hit a rest (or need a rest)." This email got me thinking about the Carter style and how one might apply that style in positions up-the-neck.

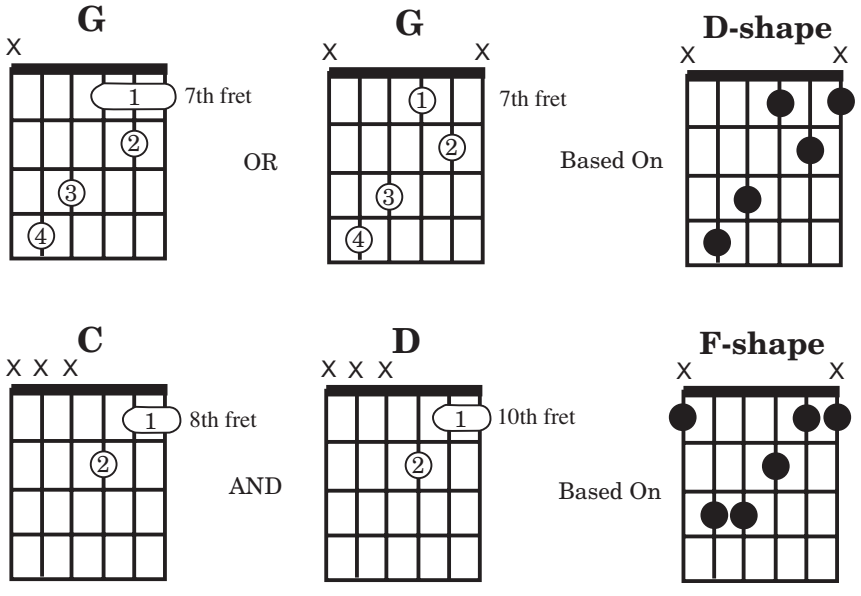
My personal theory regarding the process of learning how to flatpick involves first learning how to play good solid straight-ahead rhythm, then learning how to effectively add bass runs and embellishments to the rhythm. The logical step from knowing rhythm to learning lead would be to learn the Carter style because that style involves learning how to play the melody on the bass notes while continuing to strum the rhythm chords. You continue to play rhythm, but you also mix in the melody. The next step would be to learn how to mix some single line runs in with the Carter style playing, and then you would go on to learn some full single-line solos.

I had not thought about this kind of step-by-step learning process for learning how to play up-the-neck until I received the email from this subscriber suggesting that I demonstrate some up-the-neck chord positions that someone might hold while playing an up-the-neck break. Knowing these positions not adds to your knowledge of the fingerboard. Also if you are playing an up-the-neck solo, a strum could be added when a rest is needed from the single-line playing or in order to gain your bearings if you get lost. In the last issue I talked about holding a chord position while playing "Arkansas Traveler," but I did not talk about strumming or double-stopping while playing the melody. It makes sense to know how to do this in the same way that learning the Carter style down-the-neck makes sense for the beginning flatpicker.

In this issue I'm going to use the tune that the subscriber who sent me the email suggested, "Worried Man Blues." This song lends itself well to a Carter style solo. I'm going to demonstrate a down-the-neck Carter style solo and then show how you might move that break up-the-neck. The up-the-neck solo is not exactly like the down-the-neck solo, but it is similar. Moving a solo that you already know down-the-neck to an up-the-neck position is always a good exercise because it will probably not turn out to be exactly the same and thus you will get a nice variation on your solo.

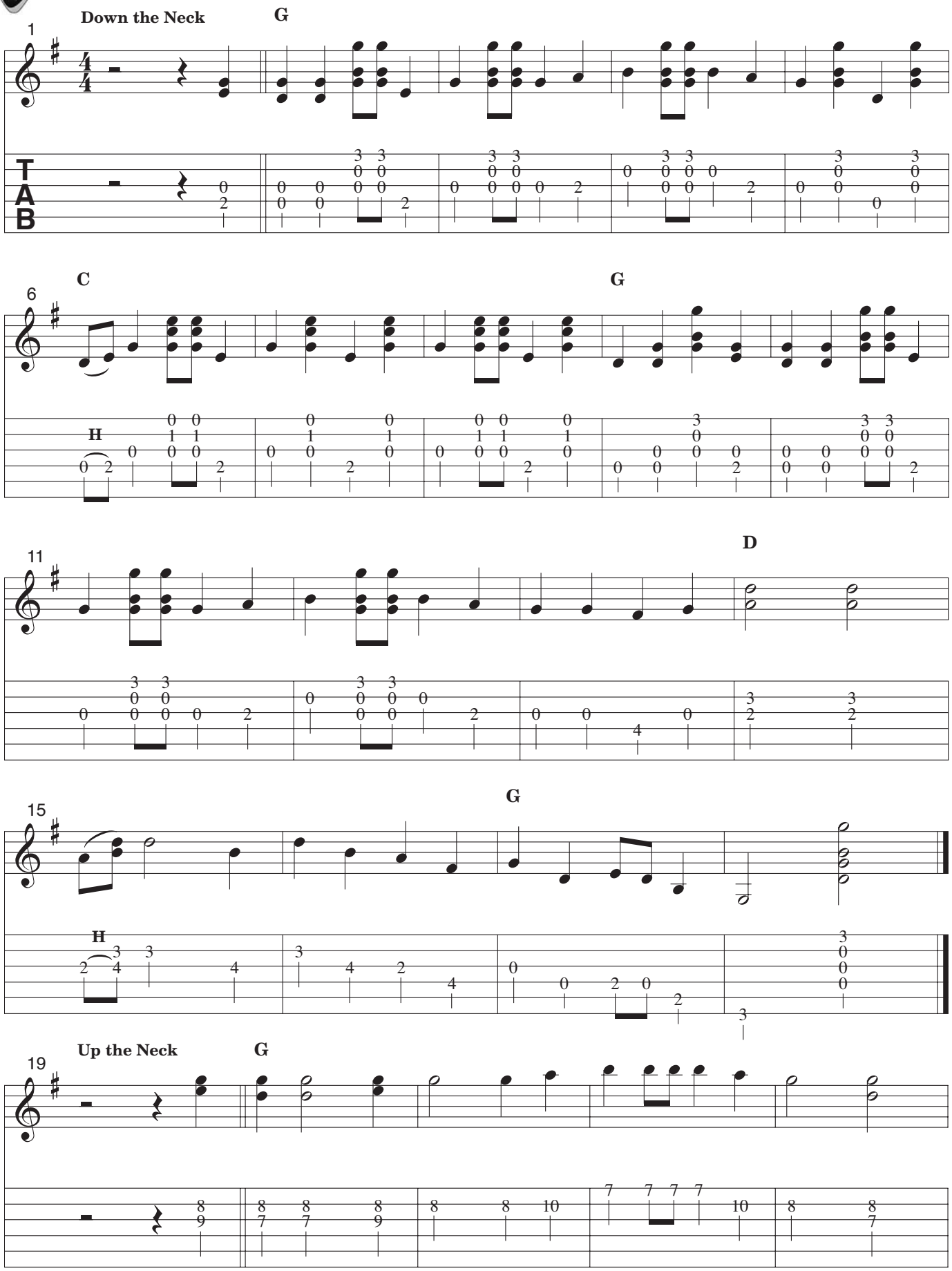
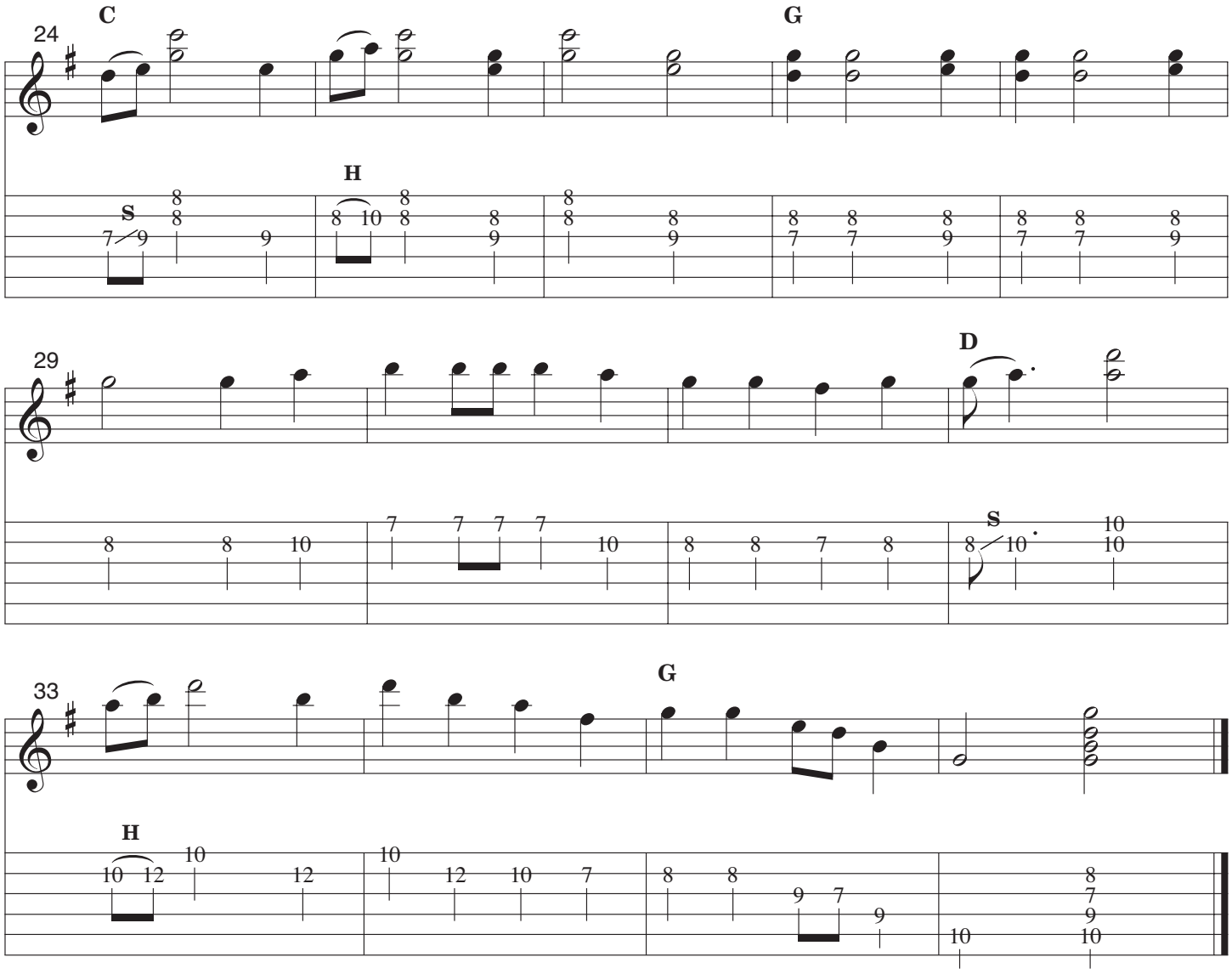
I'm playing this song in the key of G. It is a simple 1-4-5 song and so in the key of G we have the G-C-D chords. Moving up the neck I am using the "D-shape" G chord at the 7th fret. The "F-shape" C chord at the 8th fret and the "F-shape" D chord at the 10th fret (see chord diagrams below).

When familiarizing yourself with chords shapes up-the-neck, it is a good idea to go ahead and practice playing rhythm to the song using these chord shapes. It may not sound great in a jam session, but it is a good exercise. The more familiar you become with chord shapes up-the-neck, the better your knowledge of the fingerboard will be and the easier it is going to be for you to move up-the-neck. After practicing "Worried Man Blues," take another Carter style tune like "Wildwood Flower" in G and try to see if you can create your own up-the-neck Carter style arrangement.



Audio CD
Tracks 24-25

Worried Man Blues

Arranged by
Dan Miller

Worried Man Blues (con't)

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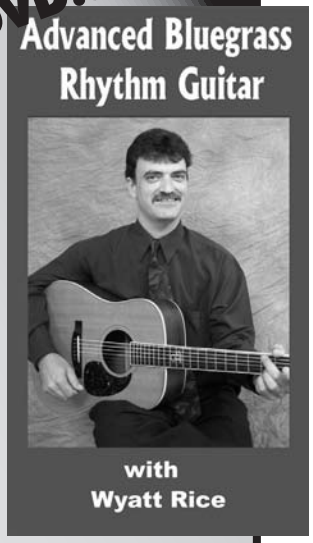
Additionally, Wyatt is shown improvisationally accompanying various instruments (banjo, fiddle, guitar, mandolin) and then analyzing what he has done to provide the rhythmic foundation behind each instrument. Also featured are guest appearances by: Rickie Simpkins on fiddle (Sally Goodin' and Dusty Miller) and mandolin (Big Country and I Wonder Where You Are Tonight), Sammy Shelor on banjo (Ground Speed and Whitewater), Kenny Smith on guitar (Goodbye, Liza Jane and Bill Cheathum) and Tony Rice (Waltz for Indira, Manzanita, and Devlin). Wyatt provides guitar accompaniment to each of these artists and then analyzes the techniques he has employed.



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You Are My Flower

by Dix Bruce

Maybelle's original recorded solo from the 1938 Carter Family recording

"You Are My Flower," originally recorded by the Carter Family in 1938, is a beautiful song with a beautiful guitar part. It's not quite as straight-forward as a typical Maybelle Carter lead due to the mixing of meters (2/4 measures mixed in with 4/4), but if you listen carefully to the recordings and read along with the music on the next page, you'll be able to learn and perform it.

We'll divide this examination of "You Are My Flower" into two parts. In the first, we'll look at Maybelle Carter's lead guitar part from the 1938 recording. Next time we'll compare it to Earl Scruggs' guitar lead from a 1961 Flatt & Scruggs recording. On that version of "You Are My Flower" (which is part of the Flatt & Scruggs tribute to the Carter Family), Maybelle guests and also takes a lead guitar solo. It's a good opportunity to compare both to Maybelle's original.

In my opinion, Maybelle Carter's guitar playing is the well from which most flatpicking guitar springs. In the same sense that Earl Scruggs is the father of bluegrass five-string banjo, Maybelle is the true mother of flatpicking leads on the guitar. Of course neither invented their respective styles single-handedly. Each used all the music they heard to forge a clear and unmistakable style that influenced virtually all who succeeded them.

There was a time when I tended to judge Maybelle's playing as kind of quaint and old-fashioned, anything but hot and exciting. As time has progressed and I've looked back at her work, I see that her playing is absolutely seminal and any flatpicker who doesn't study and know her work intimately is missing probably the most important building block in the style. She always played the melody—simply, steadily, perfectly.

Let's look at Maybelle's solo to "You Are My Flower." The first thing I noticed about the solo is that the timing is a little "crooked." I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it, just that it's unusual because it mixes the 2/4 time signature in with the more regular 4/4. It's what makes this solo unique and somewhat tricky to learn. The effect is of a kind of shifted accenting of the rhythm and chord changes. They don't happen exactly where you might expect them. You'll see this below in the fourth and tenth full measures.

The recording itself sounds like it's in the key of B or Bb. Maybelle probably played the solo out of C and lowered the tuning of her guitar, across the board, by a 1/2 step or one whole step. Fred Sokolow, who wrote a good book on the Carter Family which includes many transcriptions of Maybelle's solos (*The Carter Family Collection*, published by Hal Leonard and available from Flatpicking Mercantile), told me that Maybelle typically played out of the keys of C and G and would lower her guitar tuning by as much as 1 1/2 steps to accommodate different vocal keys and still have the bass notes and strums afforded by the C and G positions. So, playing out of C, she could cover the keys of C, B, Bb, and A by lowering her tuning from 1/2 step to 1 1/2 steps. Playing out of G, she could cover the keys of G, F#, F, and E. You'll find this "alternate" tuning throughout the recorded repertoire of the Carter Family.

Maybelle plays this same basic solo with slight changes several times in the course of the recording: once for the introduction, once between vocal choruses.

Maybelle probably didn't play this solo with a flatpick. Chances are she used a thumbpick or may not have used a pick at all. She did play her strums with the first or first and second fingers of her right hand. Her strums are usually quite light and often on just two or three strings. In measure 6, she sometimes plays an open third string G instead of the open fourth string D.

She also plays a nice backup lick in every verse and chorus behind the second vocal phrase:
"The sky is just as blue"
"The sunlight just as free"
"And life will be worthwhile"
Chorus: "That's blooming in the mountains so high."

This lick is basically measures 5 through 7 of the solo. The whole solo is tabbed out on the next page. Give it a whirl.

There are a few wonderful Carter Family collections currently available on CD, all with Maybelle soloing on virtually every song. The big daddy of them all is the Bear Family 12-CD box set covering all the original Carter Family recordings from 1927 to 1941. It also includes bonus tracks and subsequent recordings by Maybelle and Sara Carter along with an awesome hard cover booklet with rare photos, historical and biographical notes, and song lyrics.

Rounder produced a good series of eight or so individual CD releases a few years back. They aren't as comprehensive as the Bear Family box. The best deal going is a third collection of two-box sets from JSP Records. Each box has multiple CDs and sells retail for under $30.00. While the notes are not near as extensive as with the Bear or Rounder sets, you can't argue with the price and the music is great.

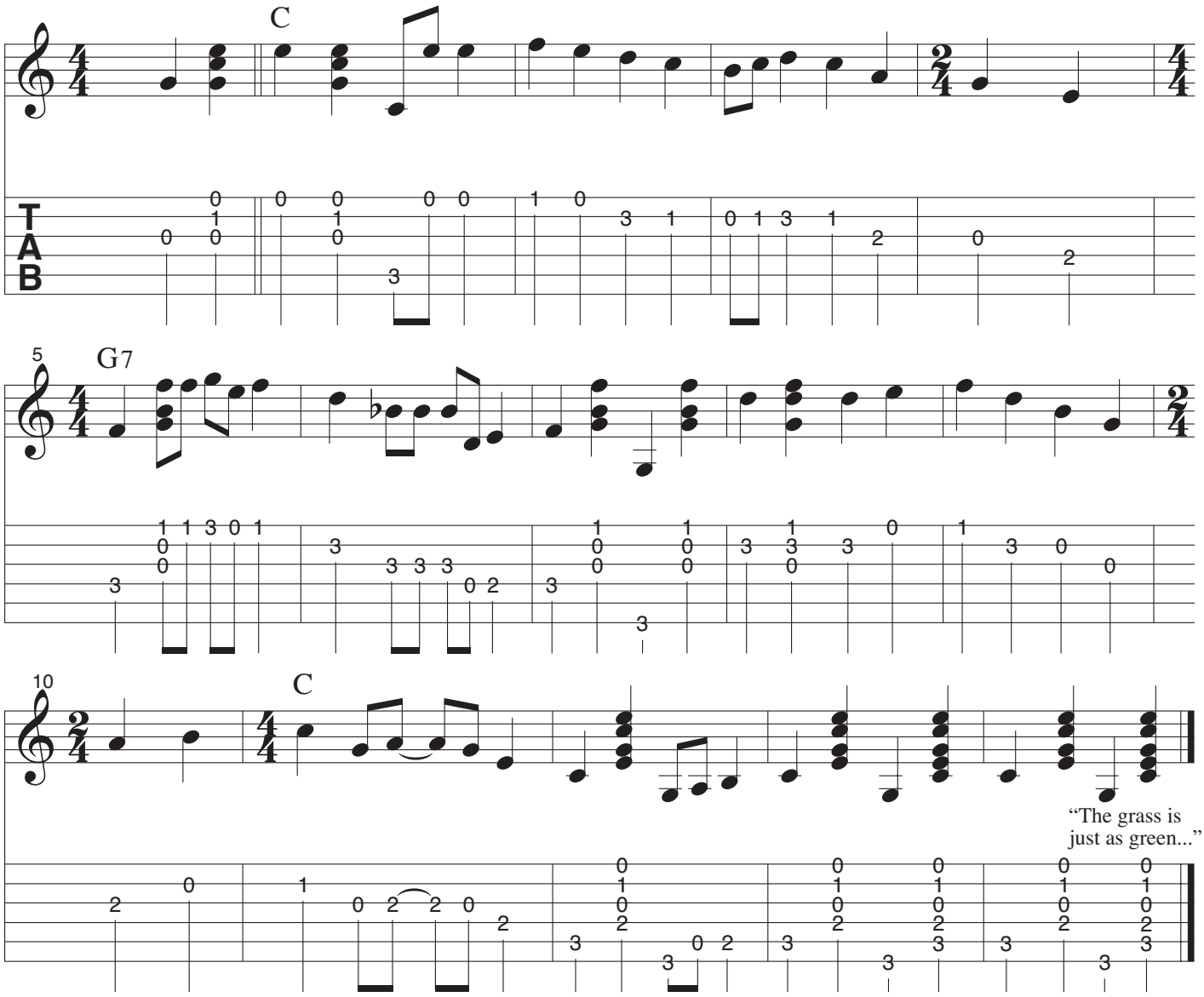
Next time we'll look at Earl Scruggs' lead on "You are My Flower" as well as another Maybelle solo from the 1961 Flatt & Scruggs recording.

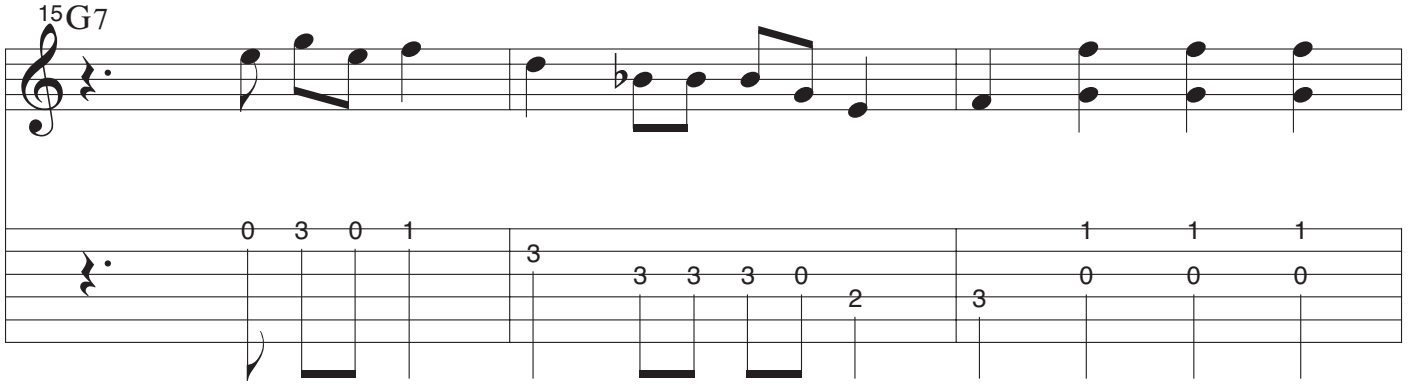
Dix Bruce's video Basic Country Flatpicking Guitar teaches Carter-style lead guitar solos on several songs in several keys. It's available from his web site. Dix's latest book & CD set is Getting into Bluegrass Mandolin from Mel Bay Publications. It's also available online from www.musixnow.com where you can review sound clips. Dix and Jim Nunally are currently performing clinics for Martin Guitars. Watch for one in your town.

Audio CD
Tracks 27-28

You Are My Flower

Arranged by Maybelle Carter
Transcribed by Dix Bruce

Maybelle Carter w/ Carter Family 1938

Back up lick played after 1st vocal phrase of each verse



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Music Theory:
Mastering the Fingerboard
Technical Studies for Flatpickers

by Michel A. Maddux

Trumpeter Ernest S. Williams wrote, "Each day we must discover our technique anew."

This holds true for every instrument. In learning from other styles and players, we can often find new sounds and new approaches to mastery of the guitar. For this column we study an excerpt from the classical tune "Moto Perpetuo" (or "Perpetual Motion") by Niccolo Paganini.

Paganini lived from 1782 to 1840. Many consider him the best violinist who ever lived; certainly, he was the most innovative virtuoso of his day and is still influencing musicians 180 years after his death. The tune is a favorite of electric guitarists. I found a recent recording featuring Joshua Bell on violin with Bela Fleck on banjo. I have also heard versions of it on trumpet, piano, clarinet, and other instruments.

Like most fiddle tunes, well, tunes written for the violin or the fiddle, "Perpetual Motion" can be adapted for the flatpick guitar style. There are challenging licks, phrases, and great music to be found within. As a side note, I have seen several arrangements of this tune for guitar in different positions and fingerings. After playing through the first position version that I tabbed out in this article, try playing it with other fingerings (such as in fifth or in seventh position).

The song is entirely 8th notes (although in classical literature you will find it in 16th notes). Turn on the metronome. Be certain to accent the first of each group of four notes. The accent is always played as a downstroke when the metronome clicks. It is really fun to play through the tune at a fast tempo. In order to play it smoothly and musically, I suggest that you memorize it at a moderate tempo (the tempo at which you can play it perfectly all the way through) before speeding up.

If you are interested in playing the entire song, you can get the sheet music online or at most music stores. Be careful about your selection, as most of the guitar tab that I have seen is written with the electric or classical guitarist in mind and will not lay properly for the flatpicker. My suggestion is to get the musical notation and write out your own tab.

Notes on the arrangement: Start in first position. The stretch in measures 19-20 should be played in first position. Be certain to use your little finger on the 5. In measure 25, shift to fifth position. In measure 26, shift to seventh position, as indicated. Measure 28 you drop down to first position, then do both shifts again, completing the piece in seventh position. Use DUDU (down-up-down-up) alternating pick stroke throughout. The last note, G#, is correct, since Paganini is setting up the key change for the next section. You can warm up for this tune by playing through the C scale in all seven positions (see my columns in back issues of FGM for discussion and fingerings). You will find logical places to break the song into smaller pieces for ease of memorization. The first 8 measures are the first phrase, which then repeats.

Mike plays several styles of music, including classical, jazz, bluegrass, Irish styles, and his own style "grassology." He lives in the mountains in Colorado. You can drop him a line via the website www.madduxband.com. Be certain to mention FGM in the title.

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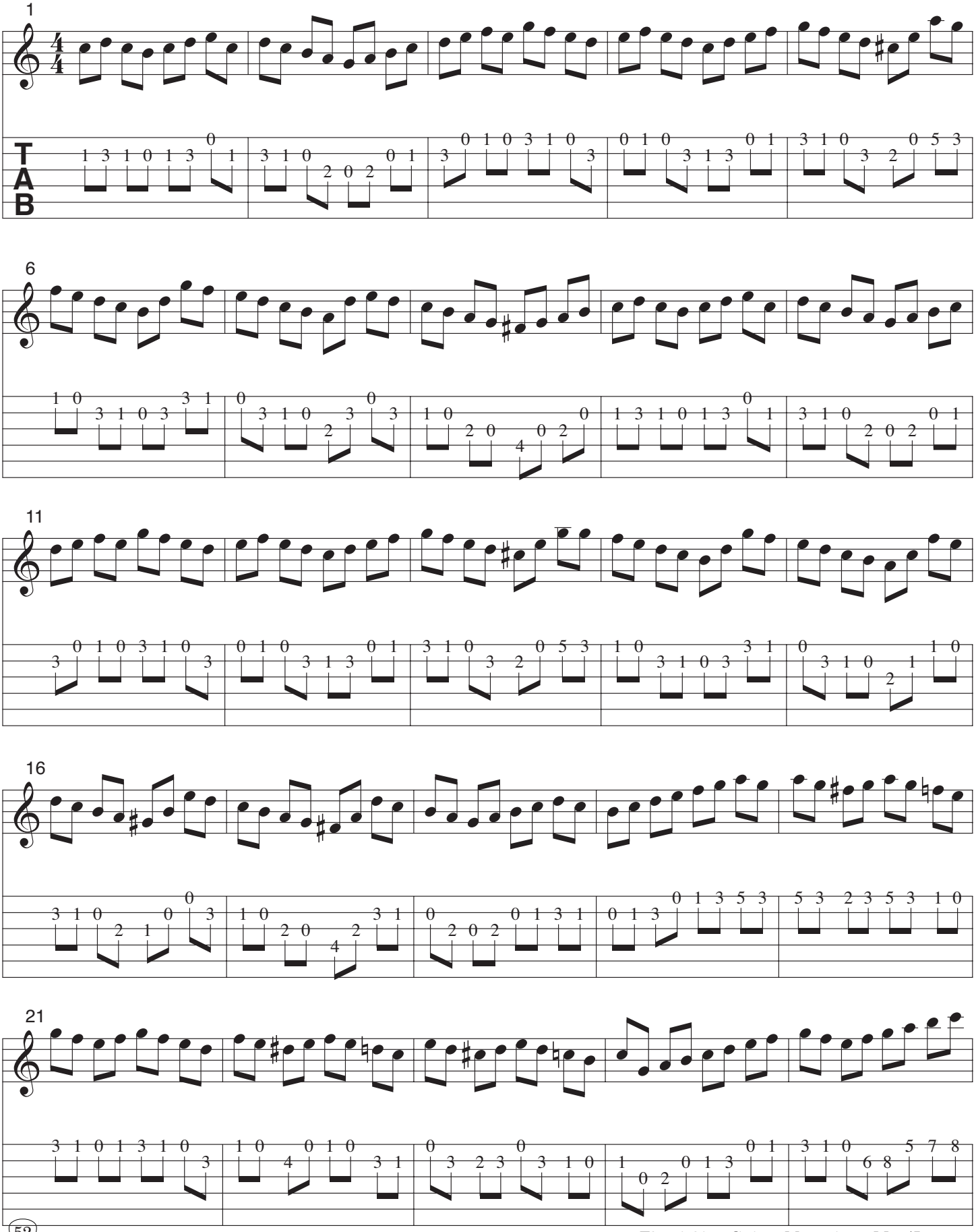
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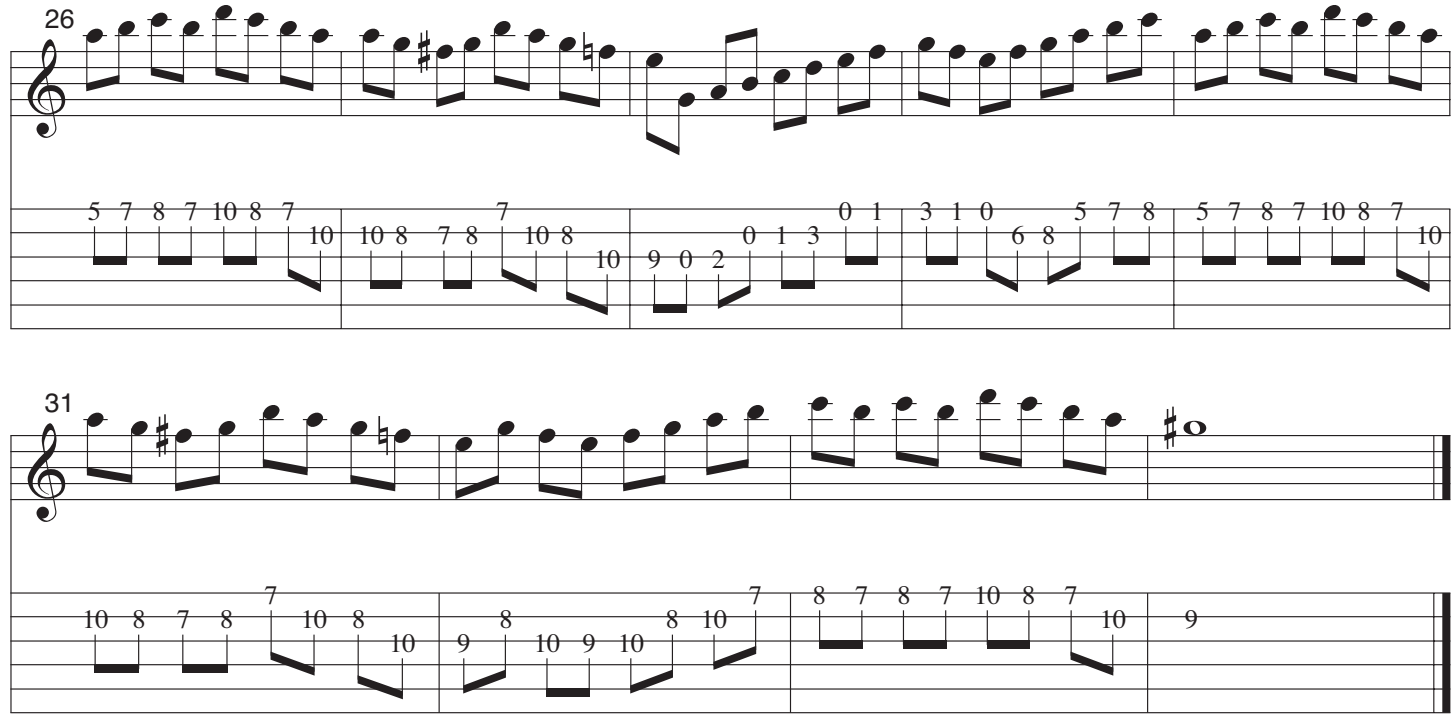
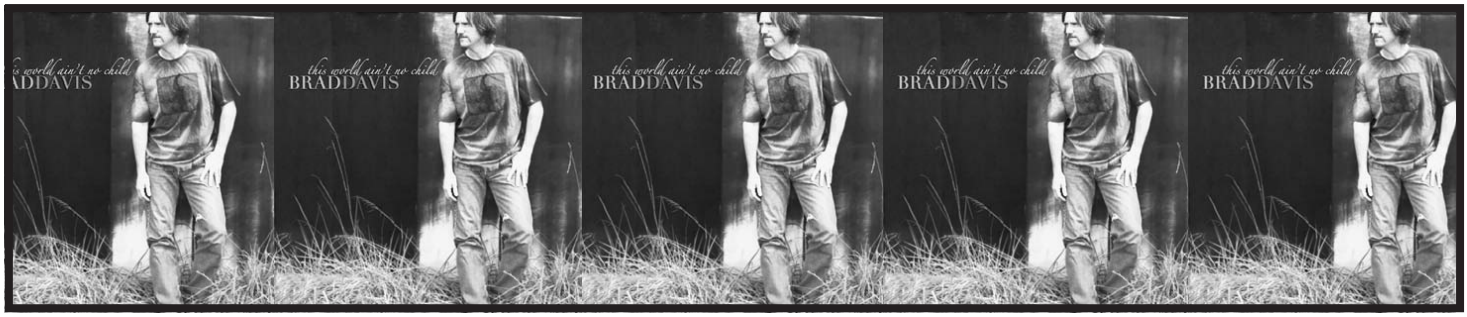

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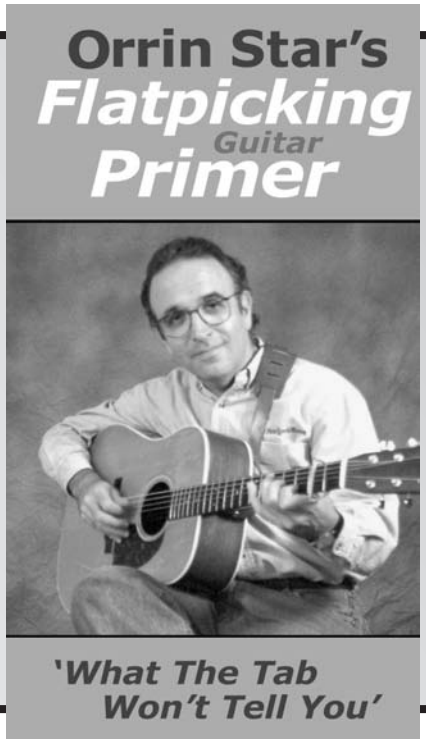


Gospel Guitar

with Harold Streeter

Chord/Melody Style - Part 2: "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence"

Last time around, we began a series on the topic of "chord/melody style," a style which involves the playing of melody notes surrounded by—or combined with—chords. Whereas that column dealt with Carter style (a style that somewhat fits the chord/melody style definition), this column is the first in the series having to do with the real thing: situations where melody notes are placed on top of chords and played in higher registers.

In order to explain how chord/melody style works in that regard, we need a song to work with. As this column is dedicated to gospel music, "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" seemed a good choice. It's a beautiful French hymn from the 17th century, and its lyrics remind us that mere mortal eyes cannot see or understand the glorified and transfigured Christ.

Chord/melody style is more the province of jazz and pop guitarists, musicians who prefer to read standard notation rather than tablature. That being said, a lot of sheet music can be had these days that also includes guitar tab, just in case tab is your preference. However, let's say there's a song you'd really, really like to play, but after a long search, you find it's available only in standard notation. That in itself would be a good sales pitch for learning how to read it if you don't already. The rest of the pitch, though, is that unless you aspire to be a classical or jazz guitarist, it's only necessary to know how to interpret it, not to become proficient at reading it. Fact is, although there's really no mystique to it (it's not rocket science), most of us don't become particularly good at reading standard notation because it's just a reference to learn from.

So let's say you purchased a piece of sheet music that looks like Section One of "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence," minus the tab of course. What you'd have is called a "lead sheet," a kind of sparse-looking affair which consists of just single notes with chord symbols above the staff. Actually, lead sheets also include lyrics if there are any, but as lyrics aren't integral to our purpose here, they're not included. To make use of lead sheets, guitarists need to know how to interpret the notes, and be familiar with the chord forms necessary for playing the song, as represented by the chord symbols above the staff. To a degree, a certain amount of chord form customization is necessary for playing a great many songs, and as we gradually up the stakes in future columns, we'll indeed be focusing on such things.

For now though, just to get a feel for the melody here, play through Section One, reading either the standard notation or the tab. It should be evident in short order that although the melody sounds nice the way it is, it could benefit from the inclusion of chords.

The goal of Section Two is to remedy that, and here's where we get into the first few general rules necessary for conjuring up chord/melody style arrangements. The first and most important rule is this: when combining melody notes with chords, melody notes must be the highest pitched notes of chords, placed at the top in other words, because these are the notes you want your listener to hear. To make that happen, the idea is to strum chords with strums stopping or ending on the melody notes. Take a C chord for example. It contains a C note on the second string 1st fret. If you want your listener to hear the C note, your strum must stop on the second string. If you strum past the note, it's no longer heard, although it's still present in the chord. Notice how that approach applies to the first note, and to the first chord, in the song here. The melody note is E, on the fourth string 2nd fret, and the chord above the staff is Em. The strum stops on the fourth string because that's the string containing the melody note.

The next rule has to do with traditional chord placement. For measures dedicated to just one chord (and there are no such measures here), the chord is placed on the first beat unless the first beat is a rest (in which case nothing is to be played) or if the note is tied over from a note in the previous measure. Again, there are no such instances in this arrangement, but if there were, the chord would instead be placed on the third beat of the measure.

As to why, the reason has to do with accents. Traditionally, the first beat in any measure in most time signatures is accented, played louder than the others, in other words. Such accents provide reference points for dancers and musicians alike. For example, take 4/4 time (the time signature for this song). If you were to count out loud, you would say "1" the loudest, like this; **1**-2-3-4. Our contribution to the accented first beat then, is a chord.

For measures containing two chords, as is the case with many of the measures here, the second chord is stated on the third beat. Again, this is a traditional approach (there are exceptions) involving a secondary accent. The count for such measures would be **1**-2-**3**-4. Measures containing three chords, as do several here, are counted **1**-2-**3**-**4**, with the third chord stated on the fourth beat. To be sure, many contemporary works, regardless of genre, contain such measures, but they were mainly compositional ideas that were more in keeping with the mindset of 17th century composers (as well as other composers throughout the ages), than they are now.

As for all the notes played on unaccented beats, or in between beats (eighth notes) in the arrangement here, they just remain single notes without chords, as shown.

The last general rule has to do with chords which do not include melody notes.

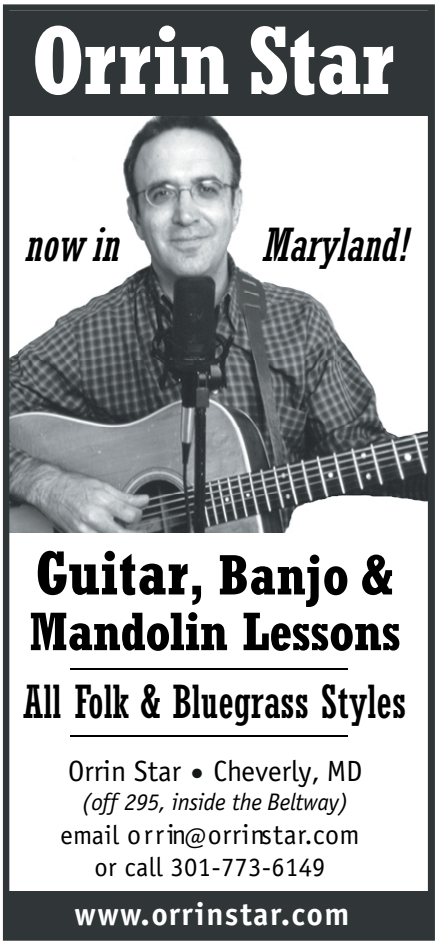
Most of the time chords do contain melody notes—either held notes or open strings—but it's necessary occasionally to modify chord forms to accommodate melody notes. Sometimes this involves omitting held notes from chord forms. As an example, a B note might be combined with a C chord. Because B is the second string open, the solution is to not hold the second string down as part of the C chord. It's also sometimes necessary to add notes to forms. For example, a C chord might be combined with a D melody note, the note on your second string 3rd fret. The solution is just to hold the D note down in addition to the C chord.

In the first case described above, a C chord combined with a B note is actually a C major 7th, a chord included in this arrangement, by the way. In the second case, a C chord combined with a D note is a Cadd9. Why chords are not always accurately reflected in their names above the staff has to do with musicians who prefer learning from sheet music, but aren't always familiar with such chord symbols and forms. They really don't have to be. All that's necessary is to combine notes with chords, whether the notes are "outside the box" or not. Their virtual names aren't important.

All of this leads to a chord in this arrangement that is combined with a melody note not expressed in its chord name. It's F#m7 in the 16th measure of Section Two, and the melody note is B, the second string open. As B notes are not part of F#m7 chords, the chord's real name is F#m11, a name that may scare off more than a few musicians trying to decipher the music.

Next is Section Three, which consists of the same melody and chord progression transposed to the key of Am. The reason for the key change brings us to another point that's integral to working out chord/melody style arrangements. Ideally, melody notes should be confined to the first two, or at most, three strings, to insure that fully defined chords are placed below the melody.

Exploration of that idea will have to wait until the next issue, however, because we're running a little long here. For now, play all three sections and compare the three for yourself. As always, please pay us a visit at www.lewalt.com for our latest flatpick additions.



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Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

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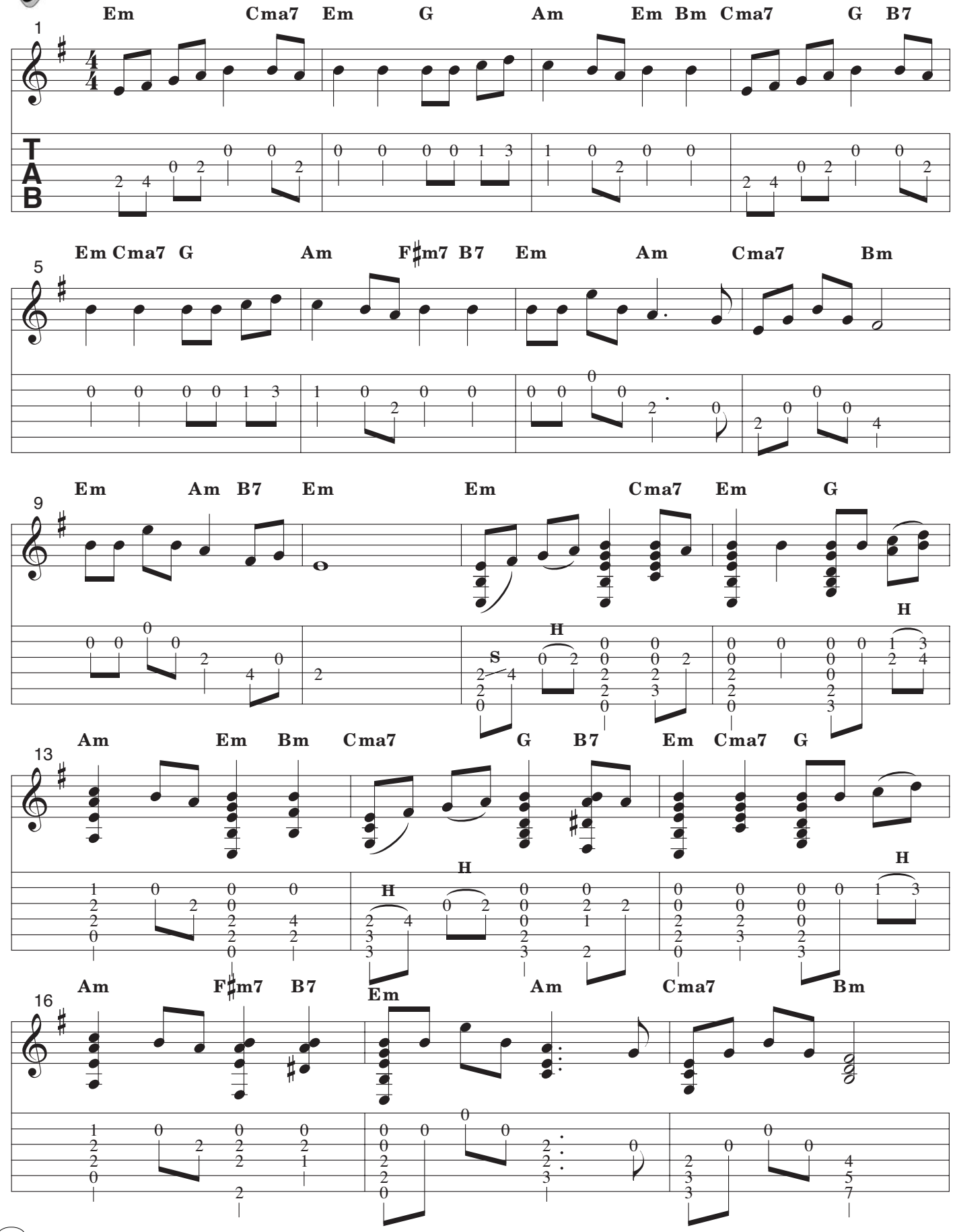
Em Cma7 Em G Am Em Bm Cma7 G B7
Em Cma7 G Am F♯m7 B7 Em Am Cma7 Bm
Em Am B7 Em Em Cma7 Em G
H
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Am Em Bm Cma7 G B7 Em Cma7 G
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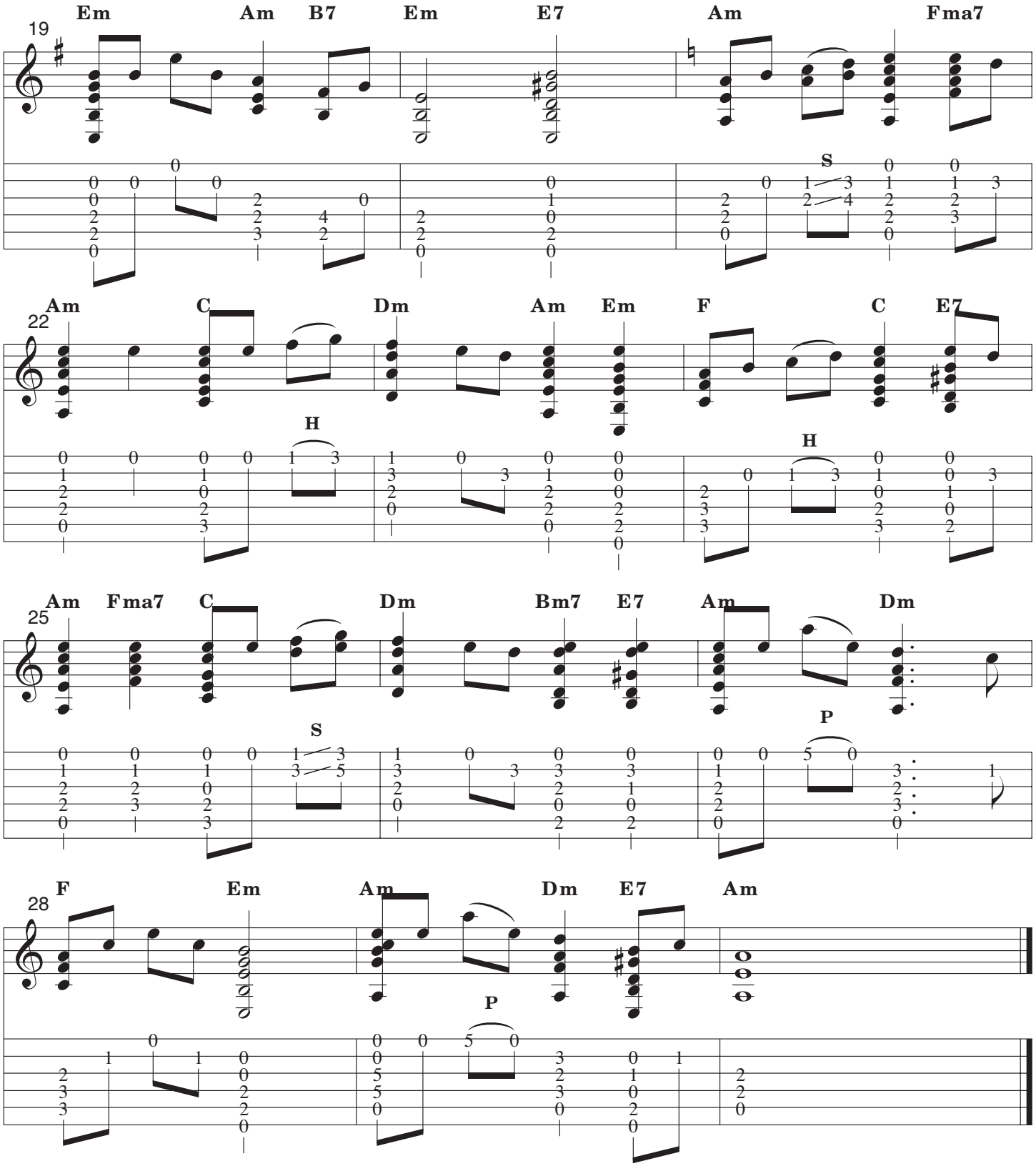
Am F♯m7 B7 Em Am Cma7 Bm

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence (con't)

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2) Send a CD with your tune to the *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* office (see the table of contents page for this address) by October 30th, 2005. Make the package "Flatpick Duo Contest." You can submit as many tunes as you would like with the same, or different, partners. However, each tune must be on a separate disc.
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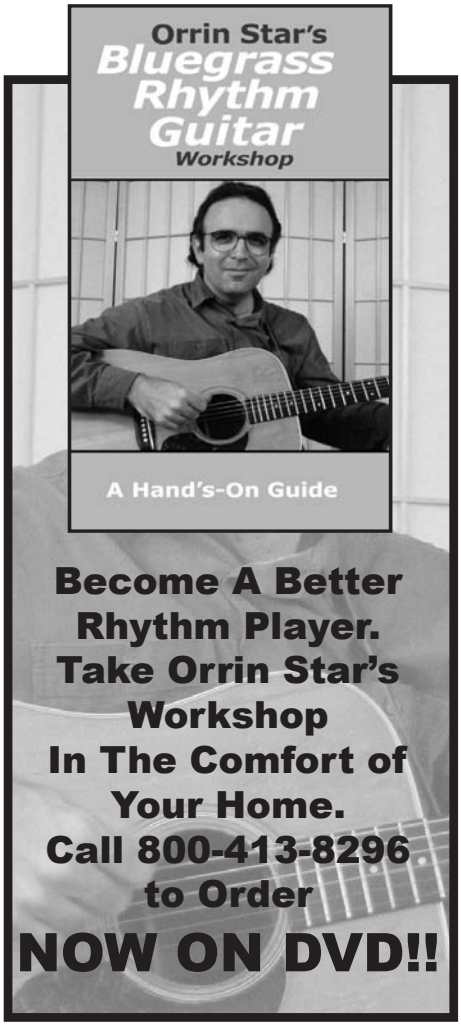

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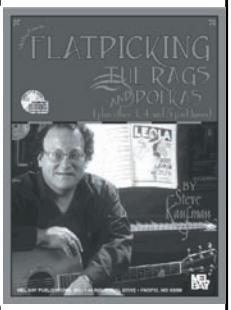

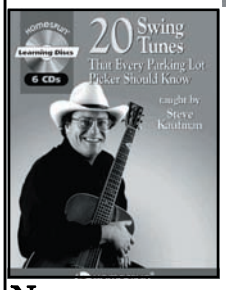

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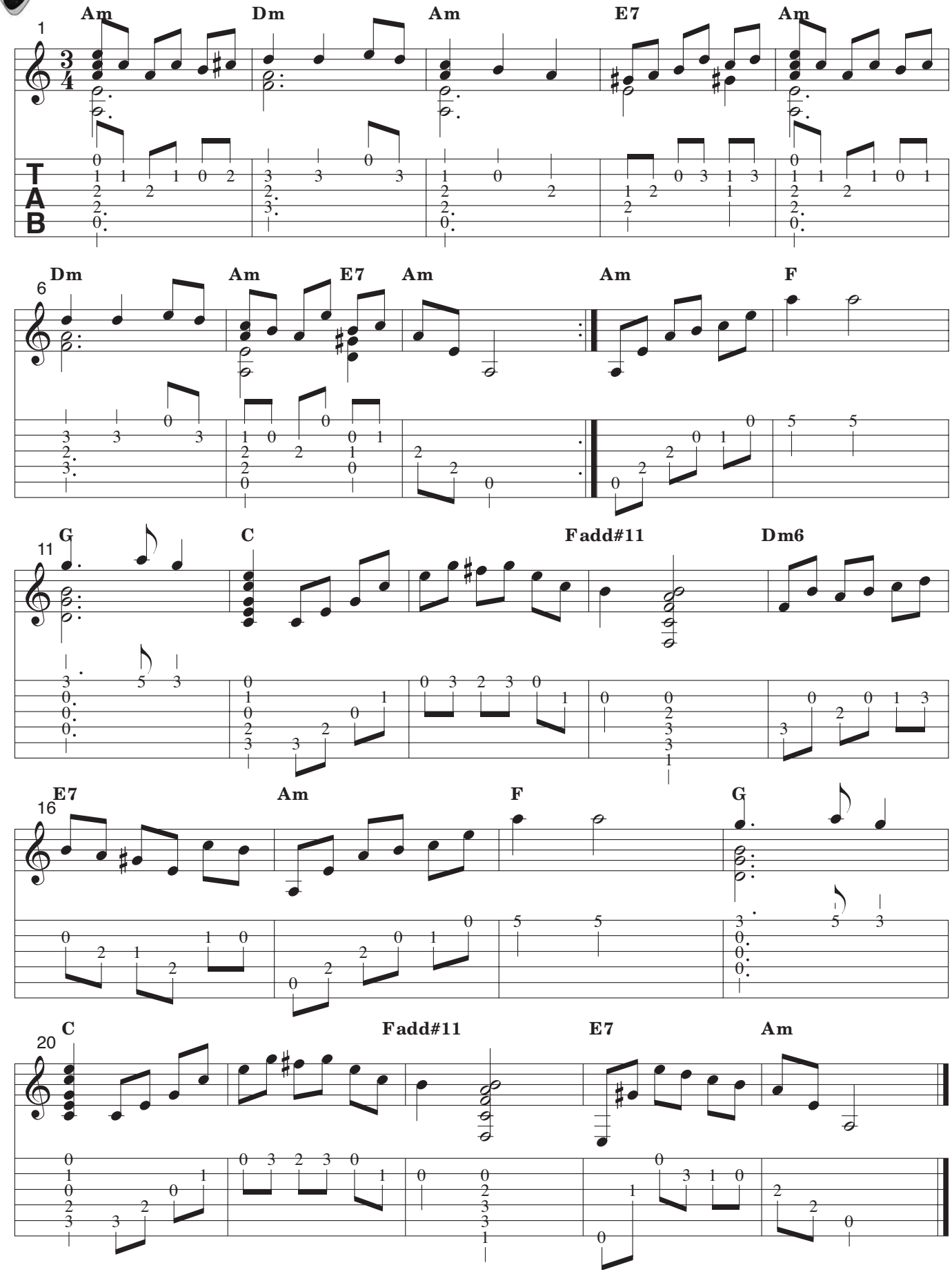

PICKIN' FIDDLE TUNES
by Adam Granger

EIN KLEIN GITARREMUSIK

Greetings, fellow flatpick travelers. My column normally focuses on fiddle tunes (ergo its name), but this time, I'm going to pay tribute to a guitarist legendary in his home state of Oklahoma, a man who played and composed guitar music for the guitar and who was one of my early influences.

His name was Royce Campbell, and he hailed from the teeming metropolis of Strang, in northeastern Oklahoma. He lived in that area his whole life, and played and had bands there for much of that time. One of my favorites among his bands was The Natural Grass, which existed from the late sixties into the mid-seventies. Along with Royce's wife Patsy, the band included Ronnie Ferrar on banjo and Dick Nunneley on mandolin. Dick later moved to Minnesota (after I did), and we played together for years as the Eclectic Brothers. He went on to play with Peter Ostroushko in The Mando Boys.

During Royce's career, he and Patsy composed and adapted some great music that is, above all, guitar music. Royce's two main influences were local fiddlers and his wife Patsy, who didn't play a lead instrument, but who would hear melodies in her head and sing them to Royce, who would then adapt them to guitar. The result was melodies that lay very logically and naturally on the guitar—guitar music.

Okay, so what distinguishes guitar music from fiddle music? Well, often nothing. Some fiddle melodies lay so naturally on the neck of the guitar that you'd swear they were composed on and for guitar.

Other times, though, a tune which fits very logically on the fiddle is difficult to play on the guitar. This is often due to just one or two notes which may make lots of sense on the fiddle, but which are cumbersome and difficult on the guitar.

Faithful readers of my column—and satisfied (I hope) owners of *Granger's Fiddle Tunes for Guitar*, my collection of 508 fiddle melodies in guitar tablature—already know that my approach in these situations is to maintain loyalty to the original fiddle melody and, through strategic fingering or guitar skill, make the melody happen on the guitar as it did on the fiddle. I generally opt for this protocol, as opposed to "guitarizing" a melody in order to make it more guitarist-friendly; I think it broadens a guitarist's scope and ability to go for notes here and there that are more difficult than what might normally or logically be played on guitar. It is also a subtle affirmation of the value of the original melody, and, besides, do you really want to tell people, "Oh, I changed that part of the tune because the original melody was too hard on the guitar?" No, friends, the path of righteousness must be trodden deliberately and we will reap the rewards of the journey.

That said, there's certainly nothing wrong with a good guitar tune here and there (the title of this publication, after all, is not *Flatpicking* Fiddle *Magazine*). I've showcased a number of original guitar tunes in this column over the past nine years; *Cattywampus*, *Bill Tenner's Reel* and *Whing-Ding* come to mind.

It is in a salutatory context, then, and by way of tipping my hat to Royce Campbell, that I offer this guitar tune.

Unfortunately, I don't know the origin of *The Happy Traveler*. It may be a Royce or Patsy original, it may have been in the repertoire of one of the area fiddlers, or it may have been a popular old-time dance tune from Royce's youth. Perhaps one of you knows? Please contact me, if so!

Regardless of its provenance, *The Happy Traveler* is a wonderful guitar tune: it lays very logically on the guitar neck, it uses the full range of the first position (going lower than a fiddle can go by a full octave), and its second part is a wonderful celebration of third-interval double-stops.

READING *EASYTAB*

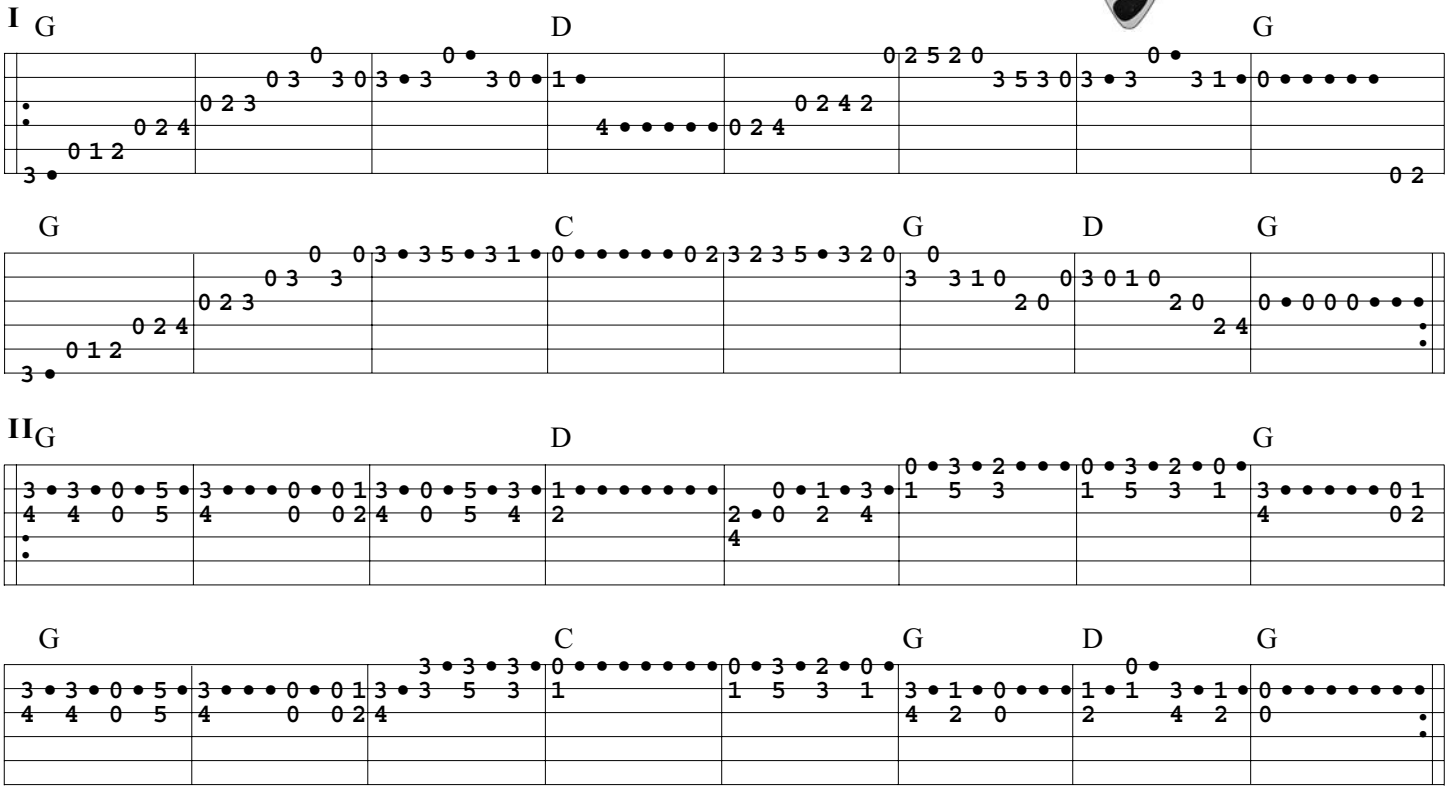
Easytab is like conventional tablature, except that timing notation has been streamlined and simplified. Since fiddle tunes are comprised mainly of eighth notes, *Easytab* uses the eighth note as its basic unit. An eighth rest is indicated by a dot. Therefore, a note with a dot after it is a quarter note, and a note with three dots after it is a half note. There are a total of eight notes and rests per measure.

FOR BEGINNERS

Pick with an alternating style: down-up-down-up-down-up etc. The first note of each measure should be a downstroke, the last an upstroke. **Include rests** in this alternating pattern. This keeps you "in sync", playing downstrokes on the beats, so that, no matter what the configuration of notes and rests in an eight-unit measure, the right hand plays them down-up-down-up-down-up-down-up.

THE HAPPY TRAVELER—by Royce Campbell

Audio CD Track 36 KEY: G

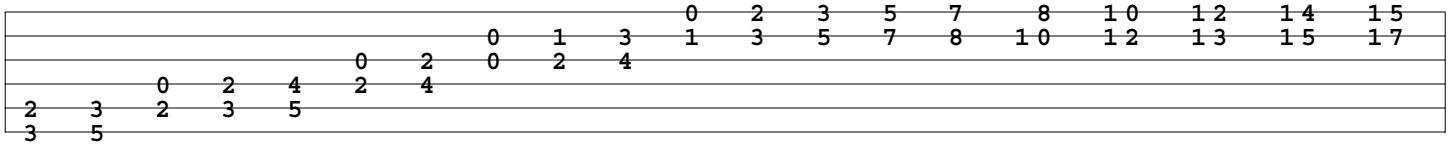


Well, how'd it go? Pretty guitarish, huh? Pretty logical? See what I mean about the third, seventh and eleventh measures? And how about those third-interval double-stops that make up pretty much the entire second part?

Third intervals are a valuable thing for guitarists to know: they're easy and effective guitar items, and they're very commonly played in almost all types of music—*e.g.* the intro to Van Morrison's *Brown-Eyed Girl* or pretty much anything recorded by Marty Robbins. (BTW, a third-interval double-stop is two notes, three scale notes apart, played at the same time. Play a first position G scale and you'll see that all of these intervals are three notes apart, that is, there is one scale note separating each pair of notes.)

As a bonus for your good behavior, I offer here a chart of third-interval double-stops in the key of G. You'll find all of the content of the second part of *The Happy Traveler* embedded in this chart. Learn these, and you'll find yourself using them everywhere!

THIRD-INTERVAL DOUBLE-STOPS IN THE KEY OF G



All right, folks, that's all the flatpick news that fits this time. Let's agree to meet right here in another two months and have more flatpick fun. Joe, it's your turn to bring the virtual donuts, and no excuses this time!

In the meantime, let's recite the Flatpickers' Prayer together:

"May our picks be slick and our strings be clean. May our guitars remain free of cracks and cigar burns; may our Martins be Martiny and our Taylors Taylorish. May we die with plectrum in hand, and may our spouses and families eventually come to understand why we do what we do as much and as fanatically as we do it. Oh yeah, and may Doc live forever. Amen."

Adam's not much of an emailer, but he can be reached at:
agranger@visi.com
Actually, let me restate my original sentence: Adam is a lousy emailer. If however, there is something of import to point out to Adam, as long as it's not corrections in his column, about which he is unsufferably sensitive, feel free to contact him and he'll do his best to respond.

John McGann's Eclectic Acoustic

The Man From Newry

Irish music has a flavor and style quite different from American traditional music. "The Man from Newry" is a hornpipe, which is a type of dance tune a bit slower and "swingier" than the faster reel. I have taken a basic version of the melody and tabbed it out as a typical American flatpicker would play it. Compared to what you hear on the recording of me, Joe Derrane, and Seamus Connolly from *The Boston Edge* CD, it is a very dry and "skeletal" setting.

Irish music really comes to life with the variety of ornaments that are played. However, in this column I'd like to talk a bit about how I expanded the chordal setting of the tune, to take it from a simple I-IV-V progression into the realm of swing. You'll see that the essential I-IV-V stays intact, but that there are various passing chords and fuller chord voicings using 6ths, 7ths, 9ths etc. to flesh out the sound. In a way, I think of this as Texas-meets-Dublin, but swing chords have been used as backing for traditional fiddle tunes going back to the 40s with Willie Johnson's Django-inspired chords in the Shetland Islands, as well as Martin Christi, who played with Sligo/New York City fiddler James Morrison in the 30s and 40s.

In the studio, I suggested to Seamus and Joe that we try a short guitar intro to set the mood, and they agreed. This intro is sort of a condensed version of what follows, where the A and B parts take essentially the same progression. I do vary it a bit from time to time, but the basics of it are notated here.

Now, we are all used to plain triad chords (G, C and D). Don't let the fancy names here scare you off! These chords are just extended versions of what you already know. "G6/9" is a G chord that also uses the 6th (E) and 9th (A) notes from the G scale, as simple as "la" and "re." These "color" notes are what make jazz chords sound different than "regular" chords. They have been around even longer than bluegrass, so don't be fooled into thinking they are some kind of progessive/subversive/liberal kind of sound!

Between the C and D chord, I put in a very common "passing diminished" chord. I bet you've always wondered what the heck diminished chords were for (other than playing the Beatles' "Michelle"). Well, they are often used to connect two other more "usual" chords, hence the "passing diminished." It leads us to a D7 13 chord, which is really like a D7 with the 6th note (B) on top. It gets called "13" because it is in the upper octave: the scale notes 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 in the next higher octave can be labeled 8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15. We usually only talk about 9, 11 and 13 as the others are mostly chord tones in disguise (8=1; 10=3, 12=5, 15=7) and sound and function the same regardless of what octave they are in.

Moving into the body of the tune, to go from G to C I simply use a G6 and then the G chord with the B in the bass to make a little moving bass line (handy when there is no bass player!). What was C in the original becomes C6th and Am7. The Am7 (A-C-E-G) is exactly the same notes as C6 (C-E-G-A). The G to D next becomes G6 to Em, then Am7 to D79. This is a I-VI-II-V progression and is a staple of swing music. Notice how the I and V (first and last chord) are the same as the original progression? We've just put in a little extra motion with the minor chords.

You can apply this type of progression and voicing to any fiddle tune. In fact, the whole state of Texas bases its "sock guitar" accompaniment on it! So 'til next time, keep on swingin'!

John McGann (www.johnmcgann.com) is now an Associate Professor at Berklee College of Music, and among other duties, is leading a Bluegrass Guitar Lab, Django Lab, and Celtic Music Ensemble. He is actively touring and recording in and around Boston with the Wayfaring Strangers (who will be appearing with the Boston Pops at Symphony Hall June 8-10), Rust Farm, the Boston Edge, Flynn Cohen and the Chagrin River Band, and others. You can check out his custom transcription service, in which you can have any music of your choice notated, at the above web address. The web site also offers lots of great free technique tips for flatpickers.

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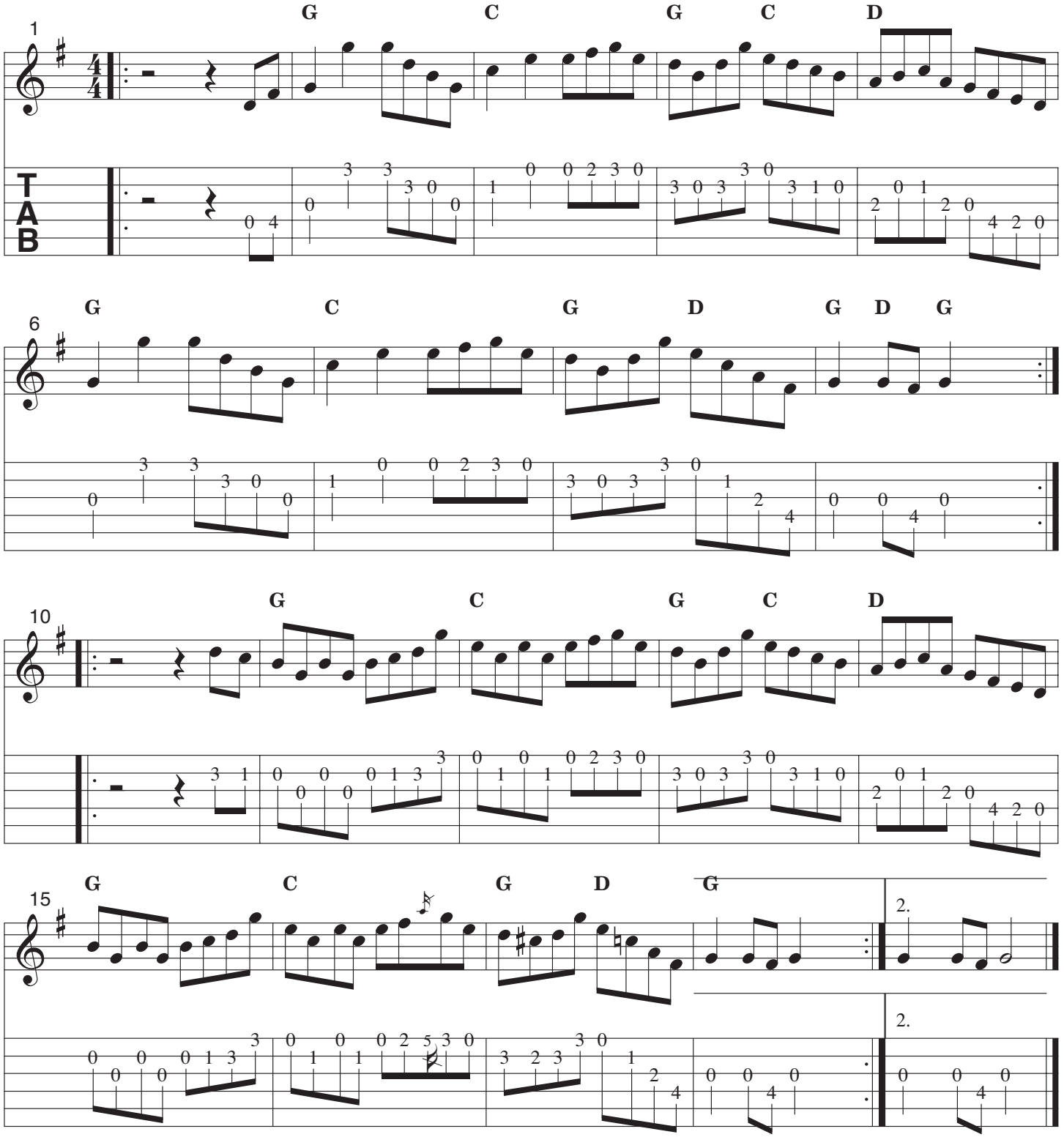
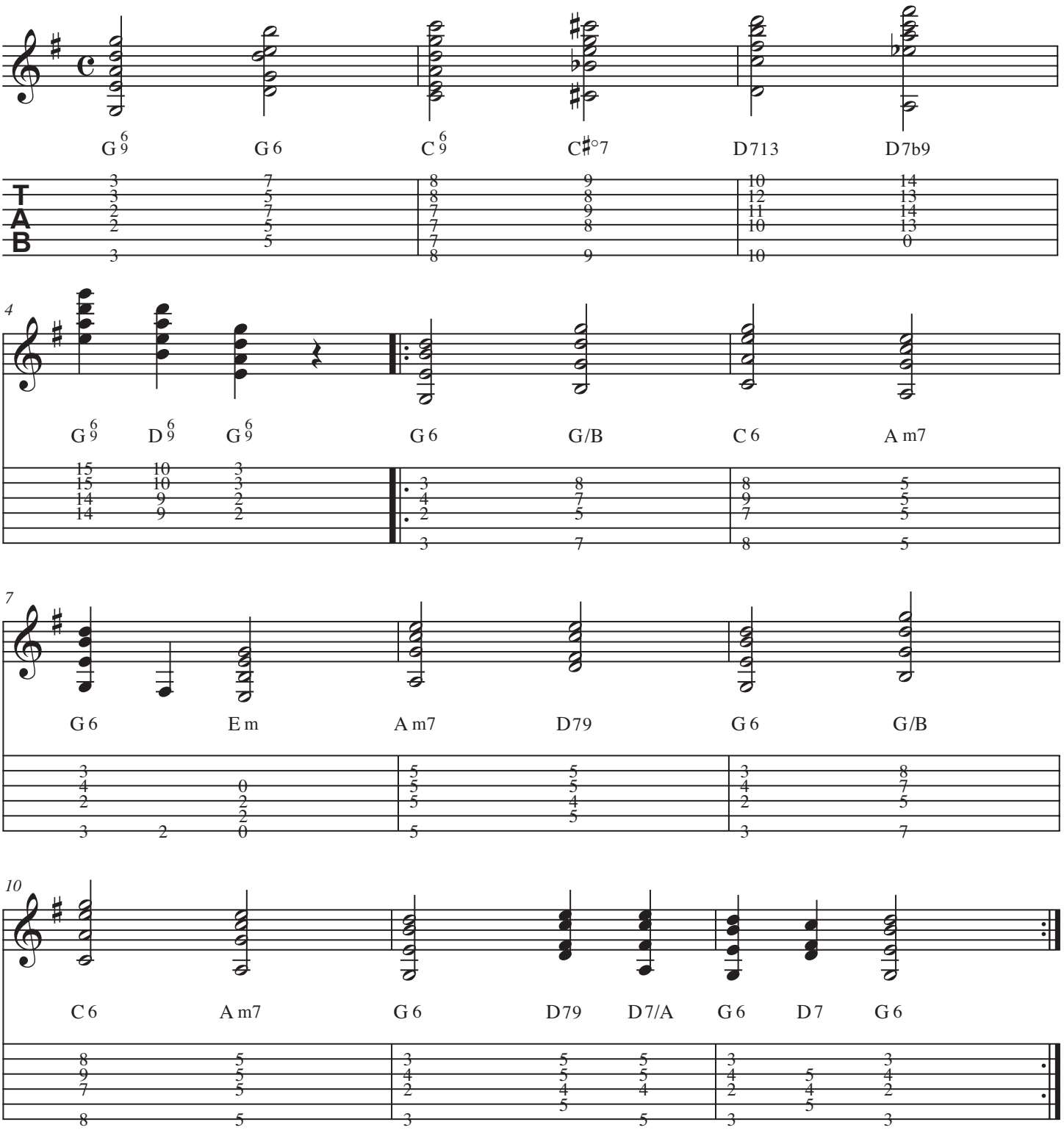
Audio CD
Track 37

The Man From Newry

Arranged by John McGann

The Man From Newry (chords)

The Solo Flatpicker

by Dan Crary

Audio CD Track 38

"Paints a picture, don't it?"

It's an old Kansas expression, and you sorta' have to be there. But it's like when somebody says something too gross or graphic, and a guy like, say, Sam Elliott wants to respond to it with understated country irony, he'll say, "Paints a picture, don't it?"

There's another meaning of "painting a picture." It means to clarify, make it really, graphically clear. Lately, as you know from previous columns, I've been trying to figure out why we're not making better progress as we teach ourselves how to play the guitar. Keep in mind, we all do jolly-well teach *ourselves* how to play, so it's important to find methods that paint the picture more clearly, that really work.

One of the time-worn ways to learn that both helps and also gives us some trouble, is the method of gaining our musical information by printed TAB alone. Yes, I know, here goes Crary again with another DanRant… "But wait," as they say on infomercials, "there's more!" Yes, there's a lot more, because I have a couple of ideas for you that will transform how you learn traditional tunes. The more I think about this approach, the more I'm sure that it will help in memorizing tunes faster, playing them with confidence and authority, polishing something up to perform, coming up with your own arrangements, and improvising.

In other words, we're working on becoming players, not just strugglers. We want our musical information to *add-up,* rather than just *stack-up*. So here's how the system really works. Let's go to the end and work backwards: you want to be able to play polished material, work out your own arrangements, and do some improvising. But remember what we observed before: before you can polish, you have to have some memorized material ready to polish. Before you can improvise, you have to have something memorized to fall back on. Before you can work out a complex arrangements of a piece, you have to have *memorized* a simple version of that piece.

But we've been doing it backwards: we want to sound really great, so we try to learn some pro player's already-arranged version. We buy yet one more complex arrangement published in TAB; and sit down to slog through this complexity a measure at a time. It's like climbing Everest with Sisyphus for our guide. We never quite roll the stone to the top, it takes forever to memorize the thing, we struggle, it doesn't come out like music, we get discouraged and stuck on plateaus, and our guitar playing sounds like, well, a big rank, fragrant, sloppy piece of doo-doo.

Paints a picture, don't it?

'Thing is, my friends, this mess has it all backwards, and we need to turn it around. Here's the right order… are you ready for this?… it's important…

1. First, *learn* (memorize) the tune, then…
2. *Play* a simple version of it…
3. *Polish* your performance of the simple arrangement, then…
4. *Vary* your arrangement; make your own modifications, then…
5. *Improvise* using this memorized tune as a base

Today, let's "paint a picture" and actually get familiar with a tune before trying to play it. We'll work on steps 1 & 2 above, and use a familiar tune ("Arkansas Traveler") as a case study. Again, notice what's going to happen here: we're going to memorize a tune *before* we try to play it, *then* we'll play a simple version. We're going to find that it's a lot easier to memorize the tune itself than it is to memorize a published arrangement of the tune. No kidding, it will take about a tenth as long to memorize, and you'll play it a lot better.

So here's how to "paint a picture," actually learn a tune, get it in your head so you can then do something with it. Some people are better at visualizing, others at hearing, and so on. So let's do both: first, let's visualize the tune, and second, hear it enough so you can hum or whistle it.

Begin by visualizing the tune. Why visualize? Because somehow some of us have never realized that these tunes often (not always, but often) have a very square, easy-to-remember structure. Of course, in TAB form a tune looks like a very long line of notes that go from point A to point Z with no landmarks to guide you. It's why TABs are so darned hard to memorize. But the tune itself may be very square, very predictable, actually very easy to remember.

Tim May

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New Release Highlight
Alfonso Ponticelli and Swing Gitane

by Dan Miller

My first experience at the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas, was nearly nine years ago, in 1996. At that time only one issue of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* had been published and I was there at Winfield, the flatpicker's mecca, to promote the new publication. Although I'd been playing bluegrass music for years and I was familiar with bluegrass festivals, I experienced a lot of "firsts" at Winfield that year. It was the first time I had ever seen a flatpicking contest, it was the first time I'd been at a festival that large with as great a variety of genres of music represented both on stage and in the campground, and it was the first time that I ever heard "Gypsy jazz."

Like a large majority of the Winfield participants, I had arrived at the campground several days earlier than the festival was to officially get underway. While most arrive early to secure their camping spot and hang out and pick with their Winfield "family," I had arrived early in order to attend a pre-festival Steve Kaufman workshop. It was a good opportunity to meet some pickers and let them know about the new magazine I had just launched. One evening a friend who I had met at the workshop said, "You've got to come over to my friend's campsite and hear this guy Alfonso from Chicago pick. He is amazing." I went to the campsite, which I later found out was a special "unofficial stage" where some folks from the Kansas City area pitch a huge circus-size tent and play bluegrass, swing, and Gypsy jazz. The folks that hang out here are top notch and I enjoyed what they were playing. As we listened, my friend said, "I guess Alfonso isn't here yet, but this is where he hangs out."

After about a half hour of listening, an Italian-looking guy approached the campsite with a strange looking guitar strapped over his back. He had no case, just the guitar. I'd never seen a guitar like the one he was carrying. Had this been a festival back in the hills of Virginia I would have thought that this guy was a beginner at his first festival. After all, his guitar wasn't a Dreadnought, he didn't even have it in a case (which I assumed meant it was a "cheap" guitar), and he didn't look like "he was from around these parts," as they say in Appalachia. However, my initial impression of this guy could not have been any farther from reality.

My first clue that I was way off-base was when all of the pickers at the jam acknowledge him with great respect. These guys were good players and they accepted him warmly shouting, "Alfonso!" My friend whispered, "That's the guy I was telling you about. You've got to hear him pick." Alfonso situated himself in the circle of pickers and they launched into a spirited swing number. When Alfonso took his solo I was floored. I'd never seen or heard picking like that! It was amazing to watch the speed and fluidity. I just shook my head. That was my first introduction to Gypsy jazz and the guitar technique of Django Reinhardt.

Over the past nine years I've seen Alfonso many times at Winfield and we've always talked about doing an article for the magazine. This past year Alfonso approached my booth to say hello and he presented me with two new CDs by his band and a new Gypsy jazz instructional book that he had written. I said, "Alfonso, we have been talking about an article in *Flatpicking Guitar* for years. With all of this new stuff, we have got to find time to put this together." And we finally did.

Alfonso Ponticelli started playing the guitar in 1978 at the age of 8. Alfonso remembers, "My uncle came to visit from Naples, Italy, and brought a guitar as a present. He was a musician, author, and poet and was a great inspiration to my family." When Alfonso's parents received the gift they enrolled their children, two boys and two girls, in guitar classes that were given at the Mt. Prospect Park District Center, in Mt. Pleasant (a suburb northwest of Chicago). It was a summer guitar program taught by Steve Derlock. All four of the Ponticelli siblings took the class and shared the nylon-stringed guitar. Alfonso remembers Derlock teaching chord strumming patterns, fingerpicking patterns, Travis style picking, some Doc Watson style flatpicking, and some songs by folk artists such as John Denver and Don McLean.

As their children's interest in music continued, the Ponticellis bought a few more guitars so that the children wouldn't have to all share the same instrument. Alfonso's mother and sister both sang and his mother played the piano. The family would occasionally play at church and small parties, but Alfonso says, "It wasn't a big thing. It was just a hobby. We really didn't have a 'family band.' We just did it for fun."

When he was about twelve Alfonso got his first electric guitar and immediately began learning to play the electric blues and the rock and roll of bands like Led Zeppelin, the Doobie Brothers, and Jimi Hendrix. He formed a little rock and roll band that performed at a few talent contests. He recalls, "We had a drummer and three guitar players because no one wanted to play bass." During his junior high years Alfonso says that he was still just having fun with the guitar. "It wasn't a big thing."

It wasn't until he entered high school that Alfonso decided to "get serious" about

playing the guitar. He heard that the high school had a jazz band and he wanted to audition for the band. He found a teacher, Stu Pearse, who showed him some of the standard jazz repertoire and taught him something about jazz chords, chord substitutions, and jazz harmony. Stu also introduced Alfonso to the playing and repertoire of Pat Martino, George Benson, Count Basie, Django Reinhardt, and Barney Kessel.

When Alfonso was seventeen he went to hear a performance by his teacher's favorite guitar player, Barney Kessel. Alfonso recalls, "My mother took me to the show and afterwards I had a chance to talk with Kessel. He saw that I was enthusiastic and he gave me his address and told me to write him if I had any questions. I did write him a letter, but I didn't hear from him for a while. He finally wrote back and apologized for the delay. In the letter he told me that no one could teach you how to play jazz. A teacher could show you principles, but you had to teach yourself how to improvise."

After graduating from high school Alfonso entered the music program at DePaul University. During his high school years, in addition to being interested in music, Alfonso also liked electronics. He said, "I was trying to decide between studying music or studying a technical field. I went to a guidance counselor to get some advice." Alfonso found out that the counselor also played music and had perfect pitch. Alfonso said, "At the time I thought to myself, this guy has perfect pitch and he is wasting his talent being a guidance counselor! That inspired me to follow my own talent."

It took Alfonso five years to graduate from DePaul because during the first four years he took nothing but music classes. During the fifth year he went back and took all of the freshman requirements that he needed in order to get the degree. Although his degree was in jazz studies, Alfonso said that he also studied classical music, university chorus, big band, conducting styles, music history, and other music related courses along with the jazz requirements. He also took some private lessons from some of the university's professors and even played some gigs with the one of his professor's band. For Alfonso his college years were focused on immersing himself in music. He says, "In addition to the college courses, I studied with five or six other teachers, and not just guitar players. I studied from sax players...anyone I could learn from."

After college Alfonso began playing electric guitar in various bands. He played in R&B, blues, and Motown bands. He also played in wedding bands that played pop cover tunes. After about two years of playing the electric guitar in loud dance bands, Alfonso laid down the electric guitar and began to focus on acoustic instruments. He said, "My ears were worn out after playing with loud R&B and blues bands. I figured out that I did not want to be a rocker." He started studying different acoustic guitar styles, including flamenco, and also picked up the banjo, guitar, mountain dulcimer, Irish drum and pipes, and "anything that didn't require electricity."

In 1992 Alfonso took his first trip to Winfield, Kansas, to attend the Walnut Valley Festival. While he was there he tried out a McSpadden hammered dulcimer. He liked the instrument so much that he told the vendor selling the dulcimer that he would be back in a couple of years to win one in the mountain dulcimer competition. Two years later he did just that. He returned to Winfield, won the contest, and chose the McSpadden instrument as his prize.

In 1994 Alfonso went to Spain to study Gypsy flamenco with a group of students from the United States. Ten days in Spain studying the flamenco guitar style inspire him to pursue this genre of music seriously. He bought a new guitar in Granada, Spain (the birth place of flamenco) and after returning to Chicago he put together a flamenco group. The group had a violinist, singers, dancers, and percussionists. They got a regular gig playing in a small club every Friday. This led to other gigs, including performances with theater groups.

Although his first jazz teacher had introduced him to Django Reinhardt back when he was in high school, Alfonso did not really start absorbing Django's material until after studying flamenco. However, the flamenco music and guitar style inspired him to explore Django's Gypsy jazz. In 1996 Alfonso and a violinist named Steve Gibons traveled to France together to attend the Djangofest in Samois sur Seine, France.

Alfonso remembers his first trip to Samois, "We camped out right next to Django's son, Babik. Steve speaks French, and through him I'd ask Babik and others, 'How do you do this?' and they would show me. It was great. They shared food and we spent every minute playing." He and Steve spent three weeks in France totally immersed in the music of Django Reinhardt.

Although he was still playing flamenco music in a band, Alfonso began to focus more and more on Gypsy jazz. By 1997 he had left a very successful flamenco band to completely concentrate on Gypsy jazz and he remains totally absorbed with it to this day. He performs it, he teaches it, and he records it. He has been back to the Djangofest in France every year since 2000 and has had the opportunity to meet, and either jam or perform with, some of the greatest Gypsy players in Europe. He has also performed at many of the Gypsy jazz festivals that are popping up all over the United States. Last year, he put together a very successful new Django festival in Chicago.

Alfonso began recording Gypsy jazz music in 1996. At first—in 1996 and 1997—he laid down all his own tracks (where he played guitar, bass, and percussion). He sometimes added a vocalist. Later he invited others to record with him for more of a band feel. He also recorded some tracks live at a show he gave at the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago (Alfonso on guitar, Louie Marini on bass, John Papadolias on rhythm guitar). His first CD, *Alfonso Ponticelli and Swing Gitan*, is a compilation of all of the various recordings that he had worked to record from 1996 through December 2002. Alfonso says, "This CD represents a retrospective of

seven years of studying and playing Gypsy style music."

The first tune on *Swing Gitan*, Reinhardt's up-tempo "Blues Clair" was one of four songs that were recorded live in 2000 at the Old Town School of Music. The second tune, "Lito's Place," is an Alfonso original and was recorded in January of 2003 with the incarnation of Alfonso's band from that era. This band included Alfonso (guitar), Louie Marini (bass), John Eichleay (rhythm guitar), and Emily Randle (violin). This is the tune we have included on this issue's audio CD and have transcribed on the pages that follow. Of this band Alfonso says, "I have had various bands over the years, but when Emily and John came on board in 2003 I felt like we really came together as a group."

For the third tune we are taken back to one of the first tunes that Alfonso recorded back in 1996. This one, "Annie-Zette," is all Alfonso (guitars, bass, percussion). On the fourth tune Alfonso once again borrows from the repertoire of Django Reinhardt with "The Sheik of Araby." This tune was recorded in 2001 with Alfonso on guitar, Johnny Frigo (violin), Louie Marini (bass), John Papadolias (rhythm guitar), and Joe Adamik (drums). The fifth tune, "Valse Manouche" was taken from the same session. Cut number six, "Djembe" is another Alfonso original and takes us back again to the first sessions in 1996 when Alfonso played all of the instruments (guitars, bass, bodhran, and triangle).

Reaching the halfway point in this recording, I certainly enjoyed the musicianship, which is superlative, but more than that I enjoyed the diversity. All of the tunes have the Gypsy flavor, but the variety of settings and the number of different configurations provide interesting dynamic variables. I found myself excitingly anticipating each tune in order to experience where Alfonso will take me next.

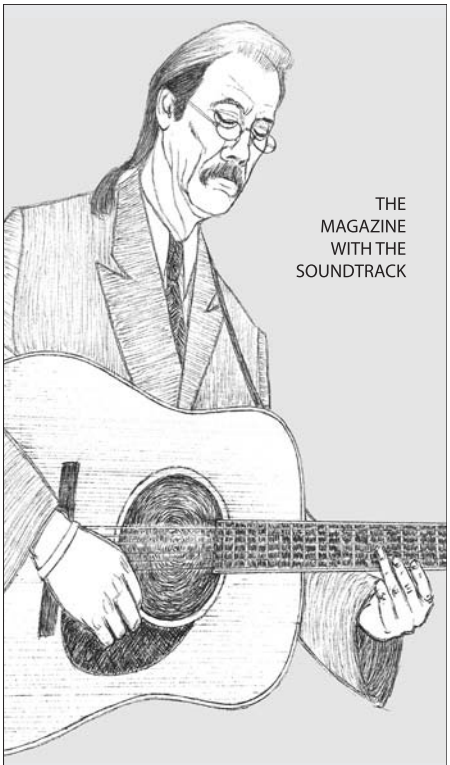
On cut seven we are taken in a different direction with a slow vocal number sung by Elvira Ponticelli, "I'Te Vurria Vasa." This was recorded in 1997 with Alfonso on guitar. It is a beautiful song sung in an operatic style. Track eight brings us back to the 2001 session with Johnny Frigo on violin and John Papadolias on rhythm guitar. The tune "Minor Details" is another of Alfonso's original compositions. This disc includes a total of five tunes penned by Alfonso. All of his tunes fit very well in the Gypsy jazz repertoire and are well crafted and executed.

On cut nine we go back to solo Alfonso from 1996 and a slow and heartfelt ballad, Jacques Garcia's "Ballade for Jessy." On cuts ten through twelve we return to the live show at the Old Town School of Folk Music with Marini and Papadolias. Track ten is another Alfonso original called "For Luna" with strong rhythm accompaniment from Papadolias. Over the years Alfonso has typically drawn his rhythm guitar players from his pool of students. He has taught Gypsy jazz music to guitarists since 1995. Cut eleven is Dorado Schmitt's "Kali Sara" and cut twelve is "Harlem Nocturne" by Earle Hagen. Each of the tunes that are presented from the live show really give that "live show feel" in that they take more time to build, then come to a dramatic climax, and then bring the listener smoothly back down to conclusion.

The disc's last tune (labeled the "bonus track") is a medley of "Mouse Trap" and "E Minor Tancak." This track was recorded live at Katerina's in Chicago in December 2002 with Alfonso on guitar, Louie Marini (bass) and Carter O'Brien (rhythm guitar). This medley is a very fast up-tempo combination that would serve well as the finale piece of a live performance...something to get the crowd excited and clapping. It is nice way to end the disc of Gypsy music: high energy and wanting more.

All in all *Alfonso Ponticelli & Swing Gitan* is a wonderful mix of Gypsy jazz music and a great retrospective look at the seven-year journey of a talented guitarist exploring the Gypsy genre. Shortly after the band "really came together" and recorded the "Lito's Place" session in 2003, Emily Randle left the band. She had auditioned for, and won, a spot with the Army's classical orchestra. After she left the band and entered the Army, Alfonso tracked down his old friend Steve Gibons. Steve was in traveling in Romania chasing Gypsy groups in order to capture field recordings. Steve moved back to Chicago to join the group.

Alfonso's band had been invited to perform on stage at the 2004 Django Festival in Samois, France. Since the core of his current band had only one cut on his CD, and since the violin player had changed from that group, Alfonso felt like he needed to go back in the studio in 2004 and record a band CD to have available for sale at the Django Festival. The group went into the studio and barely got the production complete in time to have at Samois. The discs had to be mailed straight from the



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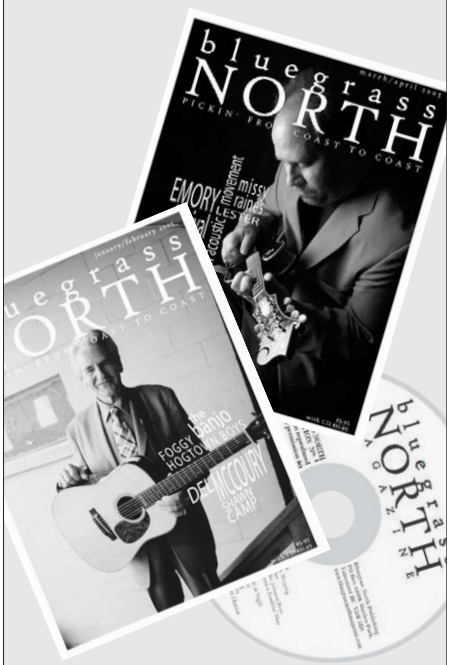

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production facility in Canada to the festival in France. Luckily the discs made it in time and it turned out that Alfonso's new CD, *Caravan*, sold more than any other CD at the festival. Alfonso was presented with a medal for this honor.

The new CD features a core band consisting of Alfonso on lead guitar, Steve Gibons (violin), Louis Marini (bass), and Carter O'Brien and John Eicheley on rhythm guitars. Additionally Elvira Ponticelli sings on cut 10; Gus Friedlander plays rhythm guitar on cut 17; James Sanders plays violin on track 5, and second violin on tracks 6, and 15; Jimmy Marini plays second violin on track 17; Sam Grossner plays piano on track 9; and Martha Larsen plays cello on track 12. The CD has a total of 16 tracks, plus two "bonus" tracks.

The new CD begins with a strongly Gypsy-sounding medley consisting of M. Ferret's "Mademoiselle de Bucharest" and the traditional "Tziganskaia." The first thing I noticed on this cut was a very strong rhythm presence. The addition of two rhythm guitars on these tracks gives a great rhythmic pulse to the music. Alfonso and Steve's solos glide atop this strong rhythm bed throughout the disc.

This CD contains a great mix of jazz standards including Ellington's "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)"; Irving Berlin's "Puttin' on the Ritz"; Cole Porter's "I Love Paris" and "C'est Magnifique"; and Bernie, Casey, and Pinkard's "Sweet Georgia Brown." We also get some Reinhardt tunes in "Micro," "Django's Tiger," "Rhythme Futur," and "Place de Brouckere," and Alfonso has also provided us with a few of his original tunes, including, "Tuesday Night," "Melancholy Tango," and "Sweet Harmony."

Overall this CD is a well-orchestrated and well-executed taste of Gypsy jazz music. There is a very cohesive band sound. After listening to the band on this CD I can see why the fans at Samois purchased more copies of this disc at the Django Festival even though the band only performed on stage one time. Listening to the CD makes me want to go out and see this band perform. The strong rhythmic presence really gets the foot tapping and head bobbing! Lately whenever I'm in the mood for some good Gypsy jazz, this is the CD that I reach for. It is a great disc!

When asked how he might advise a guitar player go about learning how to play Gypsy jazz music, Alfonso said, "There are a lot of tools out there today that will help you learn the repertoire. For instance, Robin Nolan's books are great for learning the chords and melody lines. But I think the best way to learn is to listen to CDs and find a good teacher. If you don't have a teacher in your area, go to the festivals, either in France or the US. Go and hang out with people who play the music. A trip to France to hang out with the Gypsies, even if it is for just a week or two, will 'raise the bar' for you. Experiences at festivals will help you 'crack the code'. It is also important to have the right instrument, the right strings, and the right pick."

Alfonso uses high action on his guitar so that he can have a solid attack on the strings with a heavy pick. He likes to use "protein" picks, meaning he uses picks made out of organic material (tortoise, nut, or horn). He shapes his own picks. He either uses the Argentine strings or the GHS Gypsy custom set.

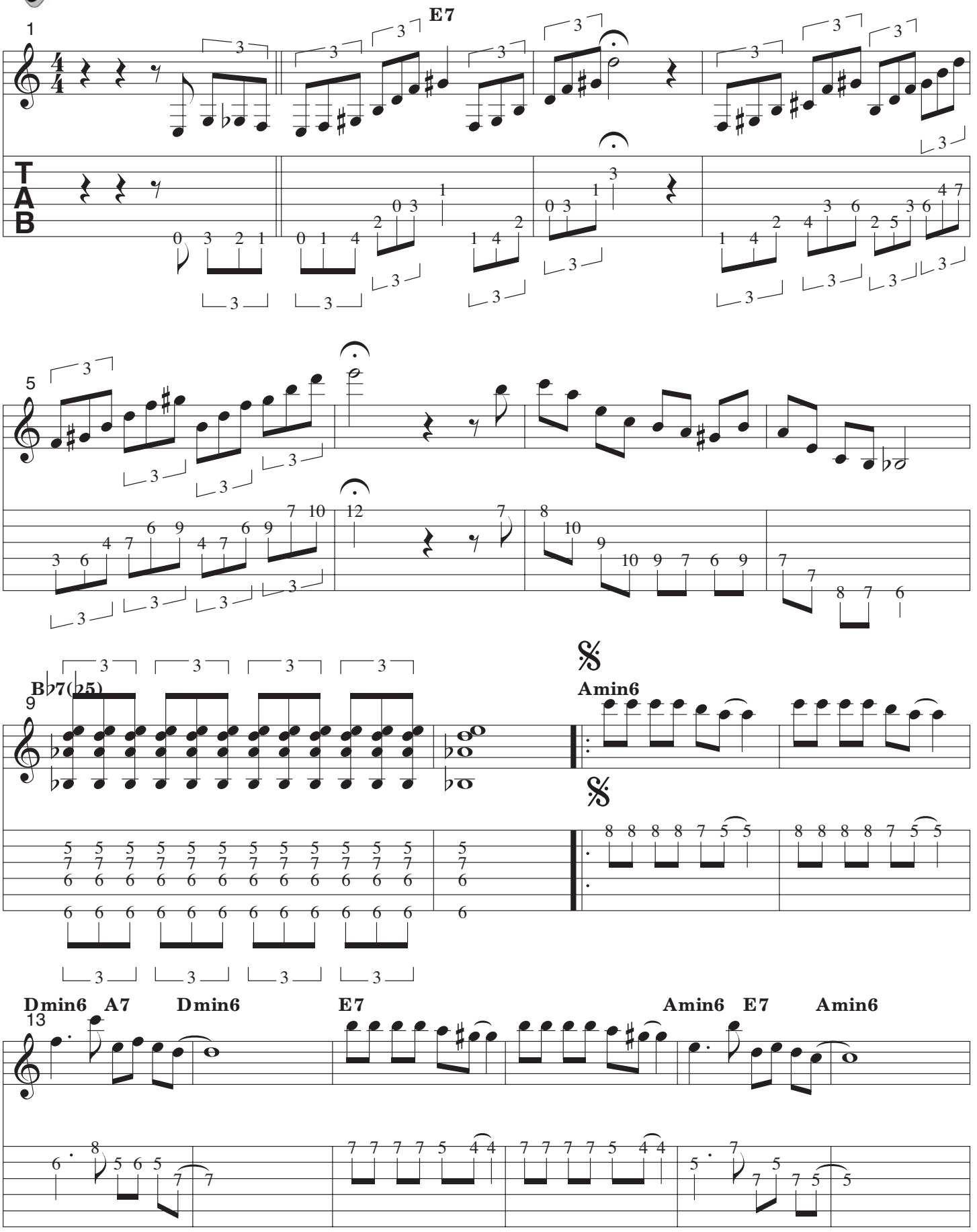
In 2004 Alfonso published an instructional folio called *Gypsy Jazz Licks and Tricks, Volume 1*. In the book he introduces the student to a variety of standard Gypsy style licks and techniques (about 23 in all). Then he provides transcriptions to "Valse Manouche," "Metro Swing", "My First Guitar," "Lito's Place" (which appears in this issue), "Tuesday Night," "For Luna," and a transcription to a Django Reinhardt solo for "I'll See You In My Dreams."

Alfonso said that he is putting out his instructional method as a series of short "folios" (Volume One is 21 pages) because it allows the student to work through small amounts of information at a time without getting overwhelmed. This book and Alfonso's CDs are available at www.gypsyjazz.us.

If you are a fan of Gypsy jazz music I highly recommend checking out Alfonso Ponticelli's CDs. They will be a great addition to your Gypsy jazz collection. I greatly enjoy listening to them and since Alfonso was the guy that introduced me to Gypsy jazz, they have a special meaning to me. Thanks, Alfonso!

Audio CD
Track 39

Lito's Place

Written by Alfonso Ponticelli

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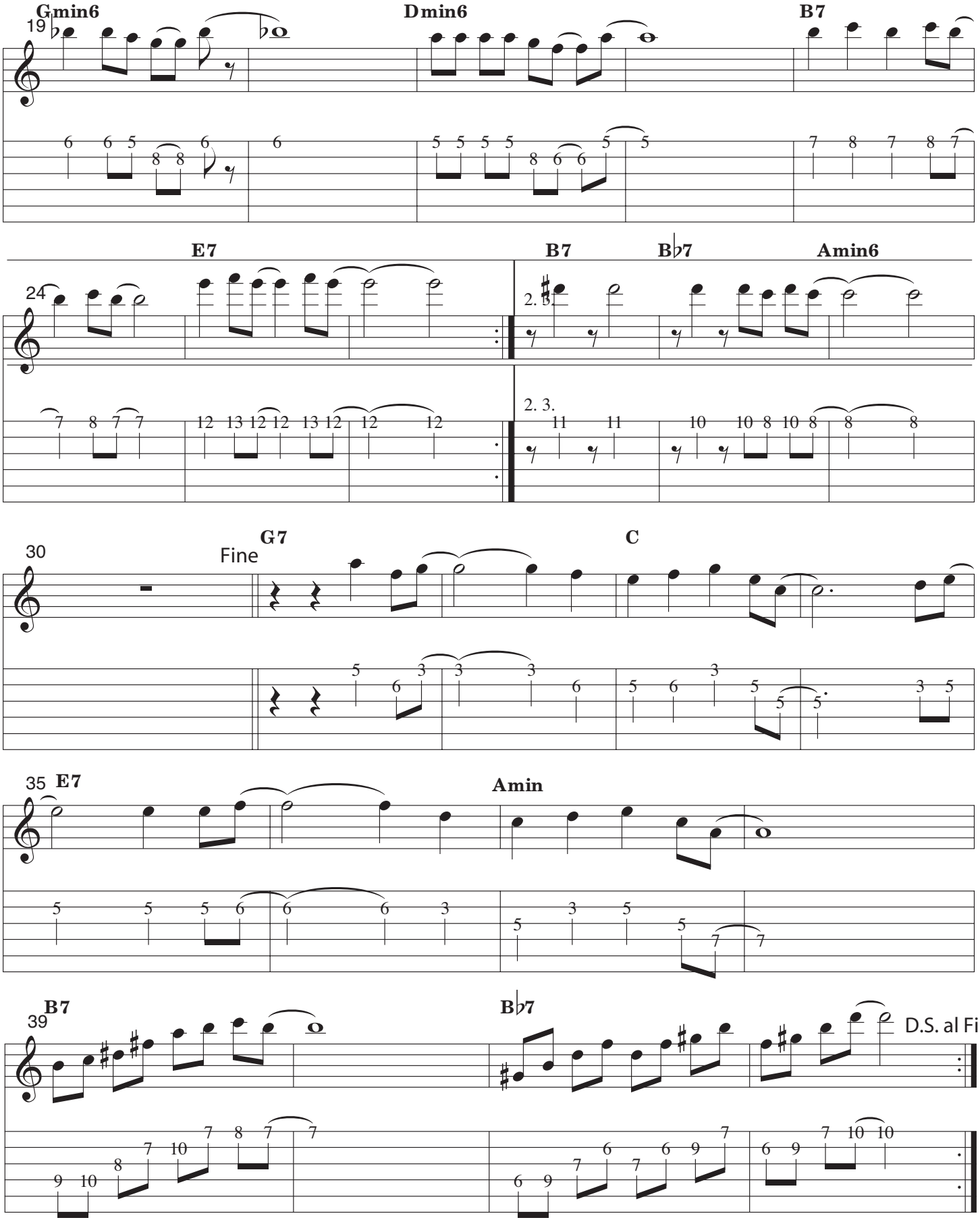
Reviews

Larry Sparks • 40
Larry Sparks
Rebel Records

Reviewed by Dan Miller

Larry Sparks • 40 is a recorded celebration marking the 40 year anniversary of Larry's life as a performer, entertainer, and recording artist. Let me say right off the bat, if you are a bluegrass fan and/or a flatpicking guitar fan this is a must have recording. It is a recorded retrospective of Larry's 40-year career starting with Stanley Brother's songs such as "Sharecropper's Son" and moving on through many of Larry's most memorable hits including, "John Deere Tractor," "Tennessee 1949," and "Blues Stay Away from Me." There are also a few outstanding newer numbers such as "Georgia Peaches" and "City Folks Call Us Poor," which are bound to become bluegrass standards.

While the music itself, and Larry's presentation of it, is spectacular in its own right, the guest musicians and vocalists that Larry brings in to record these songs with him helped to catapult this recording up towards the top of my all-time favorite bluegrass recording list. I mean, Larry has recorded many of these songs before, some of them more than once—but you'll want to pick up this new recording because you've never heard these songs presented this way before. Picking and singing along with Larry on this CD are Cheryl and Sharon White, Alison Krauss, Dan Tyminski, Vince Gill, the Isaacs, Carl Jackson, Larry Cordle, Paul Williams, Ralph Stanley, Ricky Skaggs, Tom T. Hall, Jim Hurst, Kenny Smith, Tim Stafford, Chris Jones, Russell Moore, Ronnie Bowman, Don Rigsby (who also produced the recording), and others. It is unbelievable!

Larry Sparks is without question one of the finest singers in bluegrass and country music. He is also one of the most innovative guitar players in bluegrass history. His style is unique and, in my mind, certainly wins the award for the "coolest guitar style" in bluegrass. While the majority of young bluegrass guitarist seem to want to see how many notes, hot licks, and pyrotechnics they can fit into their 20 second solo, Larry has continued to keep it sparse and bluesy. To my ear, Larry plays the guitar like a guitar ought to be played—he takes full advantage of the tones and timing that are unique to the acoustic steel string guitar. He does not try to make the guitar sound like a fiddle, or a mandolin, or a banjo. He uses the low notes, he takes advantage of the darker tone, he allows the notes the space and time to build up, breath and ring, and he always adds a touch of the blues. There are many guitar player who can impress me with their technique and talent, however, listening to Larry Sparks play the guitar I hear more than the technique and talent. His soulful solos are full of the emotion and the feeling of a song. He knows how to make his instrument convey meaning beyond the tone of musical notes. This is the highest level of achievement and the mark of a true master. Larry has got it in spades! Young pickers take heed—if you want to know how to play great bluegrass guitar, listen to Larry Sparks!

For me there are many highlights on this CD. "John Deere Tractor" and "Tennessee 1949" are two of my favorite bluegrass songs. When I picked up this CD and looked at the song list I was hoping that these two numbers would have been included. I was not disappointed. The added bonus was that Larry recorded "John Deere Tractor" with Alison Krauss and Dan Tyminski singing harmony and was joined by Larry Cordle, Carl Jackson, and young country artist Kevin Denny on "Tennessee 1949." I also loved that Ralph Stanley and Ricky Skaggs came in to record "Sharecropper's Son" and Vince Gill sings with Larry on "Blues Stay Away from Me." It is great stuff!

While old tunes are great, discovering new favorites is even more exciting for me. I found an instant favorite in "City Folks Call Us Poor." When great lyrics are combined with great singers and musicians

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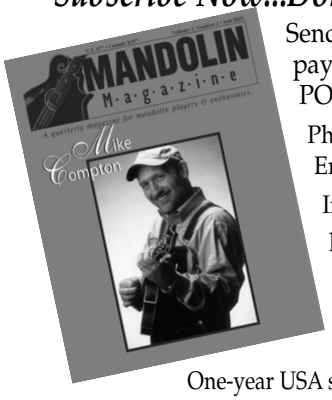

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it makes musical magic. This is definitely the case here. The lyrics of this tune paint a picture about simple country life and how wonderful it can be in its simplicity. The message is that it doesn't take a lot of money to live a happy life, but in this day and age people have lost sight of that. Larry delivers the lyrics as only he can and Cheryl and Sharon White provide the perfect vocal harmony accompaniment. I've listened to this tune over and over.

Flatpickers will be thrilled with the version of "Carter's Blues" that Larry presents here. First of all, I think that "Carter's Blues" should be up there with "Black Mountain Rag as the anthem for bluegrass guitarists. It is one of the greatest guitar jam tunes in the repertoire. Obviously Larry, and producer Don Rigsby, felt that this is indeed a great guitar picker's number because they invited some of the best guitar pickers in bluegrass and country music to join Larry on this one—Tim Stafford, Kenny Smith, Jim Hurst, and Vince Gill. Need I say more? All of them take great solos.

There are many other great moments on this recording…in fact I find no weak moments. There are no songs that I feel the need to skip through, even after listening through many times. I think that this is one of the finest bluegrass recordings that has come out in many years.

Song List: Georgia Peaches, City Folks Call Us Poor, John Deere Tractor, Blues Stay Away From Me, 1-800-D-U-CARE, Where The Sweet Water Flows, Tennessee 1949, I Need Jesus, Sharecropper's Son, Love Please Stay, Listening To The Wind, I Want You To Meet My Friend, Carter's Blues, It's Too Late To Walk the Floor, Brand New Broken Heart, New Highway.

Faraway Land
Ron Block
Rounder Records
11661-0477-2

Reviewed by Chris Thiessen

Solo projects by artists associated with phenomenal bands showcase two things: the individual artist's skills (of course), but also the ability of the "back-up" band to step away from their corporate identity and fit into a sometimes slightly different musical fabric.

Faraway Land, Ron's first solo CD, presents a more spiritual vision of Ron than we usually glimpse on AK+US projects (although he does make his presence known through the inclusion of Block-penned tunes like "A Living Prayer" on Lonely Runs Both Way). All of the AK+US folks make appearances, along with Chris Thile, Sara and Sean Watkins, Stuart Duncan, Luke Bulla, Adam Steffey, the Forbes family, and a host of other acoustic luminaries. And all involved have stepped perfectly into supporting roles.

This CD allows Block (who also produced the project) to demonstrate his skills at both writing tunes (all the tunes on this CD are original) and playing in a variety of styles. "He's Holding On to Me" perfectly recaptures the feeling and content of the classic Monroe Bluegrass Quartet gospel tunes, while the title cut is very 21st-century contemporary acoustic music.

While each tune is a heartfelt aspect of Ron's personal theology, this is no in-your-face proselytization. You can as easily appreciate the music as the message, although the two nicely intertwine. All the excellence in musical technique and expression you have come to expect from Block as a member of AK+US emerges here; the only difference is the integral message. Drawing inspiration from sources as varied as Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* George MacDonald, CS Lewis, and *The Matrix*, Block's music and lyrics wind around the struggle of just going through each day while trying to put your beliefs into practice.

The accompanying CD booklet provides lyrics, song notes, and a detailed listing of the artists playing on each tune. That's especially useful when (as on "In The Morning Light") you hear a great guitar-mandolin shared break, and you can discover for yourself "Ah! That's what Tyminski and Thile sound like together."

A mandolinist friend of mine loves to sing baritone in gospel quartets. He's also Jewish. As we were practicing one day, I was struck by the theological paradox between his faith and what we were singing. When I asked him, he laughed: "Man, it's all about the music."

Faraway Land is indeed about the music, and a bit more as well. If this CD is just the first indicator of what Ron Block can do as a songwriter, I'm already reserving a space on my "must buy" CD list for his next project.

Song List: Faraway Land; He's Holding On To Me; Your Heart Has Found a Home; Searching; Is It Any Wonder?; Higher Than Man; Another Life I'm Living On; In The Morning Light; Set Your Children Free; Donal's Lullaby; In Memory of Steve; Let Me Be You

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Lonely Runs Both Ways
Alison Krauss and Union Station
Rounder 11661-0525-2

Reviewed by Chris Thiessen

Success is the harshest critic of all. AK+US is arguably one of the finest bluegrass bands around, but their large fan base—which now firmly extends into the world of "contemporary country" music—means that they have to carefully balance hard-edged bluegrass against the soft ballads that Alison's voice carries so well. That's a tough musical tightrope to walk, but AK+US is up to that task and a whole lot more.

If you're a self-avowed "hard-edged bluegrass" fan, you may at first foolishly choose to skip past the "country" tunes and immediately access the tunes like Del McCoury's "Rain Please Go Away," Douglas' instrumental "Unionhouse Branch," or "This Sad Song" (co-written by Alisons Krauss and Brown, just to dispel the nasty rumor that women can't write bluegrass tunes), Ron Block's "I Don't Have To Live This Way," or Dan Tyminski's poignant rendition of the Woody Guthrie standard "Pastures of Plenty." But since most of the tunes on the CD are separated by only 3-4 seconds, you're sucked into a soft ballad en route to another "bluegrass" tune. (Perhaps that's the real meaning behind this CD's title.) This is an album that subtly grows on you in its entirety.

For a case in point, start at cut 11, "This Sad Song." You've got a simple but grabbing 9-second initial interplay between fiddle and banjo, and then the rest of the band jumps in. Lyrics are straightforward without complexity, but listen carefully to the last 20 seconds of the tune. The same fiddle-banjo line that kicked off the tune returns, but now the other instruments toss in acoustic garnishments to that line, an apparently chaotic build to a great final chord. But only 4 seconds later "Doesn't Have to Be This Way" starts (which provides a very simple and tasteful Ron Block lead), and it's only a short 3 and 1/2 minutes before "I Don't Have to Live This Way" brings in the familiar "you've been treating me bad" bluegrass theme. My suggestion is just to put the CD in your player, start at cut 1, and just let the music roll over you.

As always, Dan Tyminski and Ron Block share rhythm and lead guitar work. A few notable points (in no specific order, of course): Ron's leads on "Borderline" or "It Wouldn't Be So Bad" or Dan's leads on "I Don't Have to Live This Way" or "Unionhouse Branch." Of course, you could always just put on headphones and listen carefully to the really sophisticated rhythm work either of these artists adds to every tune. There's a graduate course in rhythm guitar!

And of course you've got Jerry Douglas' Dobro work and Ron's banjo and Alison's fiddle and Barry Bale's bass and vocals by Alison, Ron, and Dan. Whether you listen to AK+US from the "contemporary country" viewpoint or the "hard-edge bluegrass" viewpoint, it all amounts to this: *Lonely Runs Both Ways* adds another page to the increasing catalog of excellent music from AK+US.

Song List: Gravity; Restless; Rain Please Go Away; Goodbye Is All We Have; Unionhouse Branch; Wouldn't Be So Bad; Pastures of Plenty; Crazy As Me; Borderline; My Poor Old Heart; This Sad Song; Doesn't Have to Be This Way; I Don't Have to Live This Way; If I Didn't Know Any Better; A Living Prayer

The Road West
John Reischman & the Jaybirds
Corvus Records 012

Reviewed by Chris Thiessen

Field Guide (2003) and *John Reischman & The Jaybirds* (2001) have both gotten lots of time on both my home and car CD players. In late December 2004 I heard that *The Road West* was slated for a February or March release. I started pestering my local CD vendors in early January. By the middle of February, none of them would return my calls. In early March I found it necessary to purchase my copy at 1AM out of the trunk of a car parked at a local convenience store. It cost me full retail plus three large Mountain Dew Slurpies. (Not really, but had that been required…).

So first I'll say *The Road West* was well worth the wait.

The Jaybirds are remarkably consistent. They've not slacked off from being excellent musicians, but they actually seem to have

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become more collectively perceptive of each other's strengths (and they were great to begin with)! They know where the notes go; but they're even better at knowing where the notes don't need to be and how the music should fit together.

Take "Crowberry," the CD's final cut. It starts with a moderately fast signature note-for-note introduction (a fiddle, guitar, and mandolin trio). When the intro completes, banjo and bass join in. Even though there's a break in sound, Jim Nunally has a superbly subtle full-chord sweep that escorts Trish Gagnon's bass and Nick Hornbuckle's banjo into the tune. Bass and banjo take center stage, while fiddle and mandolin provide a frame on the periphery of the tune. Nunally's rhythm is underneath all, occasionally rising for a quick accent. That phrase ends, and Nunally has a guitar solo for the next 26 seconds. Again, it's not lightening-fast, but it doesn't need to be: the solo follows the tune's established rhythm without calling attention to itself. It's the same thing with the solos for Reischman and then Greg Spatz. The tune closes with a full-band reprise of the intro. Now Nunally and Reischman restart the note-for-note, with the fiddle flowing above and then diving in, while the bass and banjo support the dance. Now the note-for-note trio is cleaner and a little more intense, and the tune ending not a huge crescendo, but a well-defined and very controlled closure. Superb control.

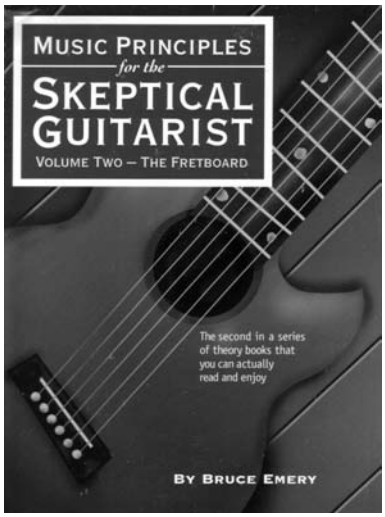
The remainder of the CD is just as good, and provides us East Coast-bound pickers with a view of how the northern West Coast folks posit bluegrass. Trisha Gagnon's voice—and her duets with John Reischman or Jim Nunally—provide a fresh vocal shift. As an example, listen to "You'll Find Her Name Written There," the Bill Monroe classic, or "As Time Draws Near" (a special favorite of mine because of Nunally's exquisitely sparse guitar work). Throw in Nick Hornbuckle's instrumental "Deep Dark Sea" or Reischman's ghost-like "Allens Creek." Just listen to them all!

Most CDs lose their acoustic luster after repeated listenings. (I listen to any given CD 10-12 times in the process of reviewing it, and some don't make it that far.) But I've found that any Jaybirds CD only gets better the more often and the more closely you listen. For a flatpicker, Jim Nunally's rhythm and lead work is phenomenal and well worthy of tabbing out to figure what he does. But in the context of this band with these musicians it just gets even better. And that, fellow listeners, is it: CDs like *The Road West* allow us to glimpse the dynamic of superb artists at work. I don't think it gets much better. But then, I expect to be pleasantly surprised in 2007, when the next Jaybirds CD should be coming out…unless I make that long drive to Canada first.

Song List: Roustabout; Hop High My Lulu Gal; Home Sweet Home; Sandy Boys; Travelin' the Road West; In The Fall; Deep Dark Sea; Blackberry Ramble; Liza Jane; Old Reuben No.1; Allens Creek; You'll Find Her Name; Troubles; The Home Coming; As Time Draws Near; Crowberry

Instructional Material Reviews

Music Principles for the Skeptical Guitarist Volume 2: The Fretboard by Bruce Emery


MUSIC PRINCIPLES
for the
SKEPTICAL
GUITARIST
VOLUME TWO — THE FRETBOARD
The second in a series of theory books that you can actually read and enjoy
BY BRUCE EMERY

Reviewed by Dan Miller

In the last issue I reviewed Volume One of Bruce Emery's series called *Music Principles for the Skeptical Guitarist* and talked about the easy-to-understand and practical presentation of the book. Volume Two *The Fretboard* continues in the same style and, building on the material presented in the first volume, gives guitar players an understandable presentation of the guitar's entire fretboard.

Understanding the fretboard of the guitar is one of those things that many guitar players, especially in traditional and roots music, seem to find baffling. In the majority of instructional methods, this material is presented by a teacher who has either spent years in college studying music theory or spent even more years studying jazz guitar and they write as they are trying to impress the reader with their vast knowledge instead of really trying to teach something. The bluegrass or folk guitarist who simply wants to understand a bit more about the guitar fretboard can easily get frustrated when all of the music theory letters, numbers, and unfamiliar terminology are thrown at us in a seemingly endless barrage. It is a language unfamiliar to us.

If you are someone who has felt this frustration, I can sympathize. Until about six months ago, whenever someone well versed in music theory started talking to me about music, I would usually get lost pretty quickly. I felt like my eyes would roll back in my head and after the first few sentences all I would hear was blah-blah-blah. I nodded as if I was following the conversation, but, in truth, nothing was really sinking in. It was like listening to a foreign language. However, I will say that once I decided that I was going to "bite the bullet" and learn this language, I found that it was not quite as mysterious as I originally thought. There is definitely a lot to it and it can get pretty deep. However, if you understand some of the concepts and, like any new language, continue to work with it on a regular basis, the murky waters do begin to clear.

I say all that in order to say this, if you are interested in learning the language of music, especially as it applies to the guitar, Bruce Emery's series is a great place to start. Bruce's advertising says that his books are "theory books that you can actually read and enjoy." I have found this to be true. His books are easy-to-read, understandable, and enjoyable. I especially like all of the graphics that he employs and the various examples and exercises he demonstrates to help the reader practically apply the knowledge.

The "enjoyable" part of reading these books comes with the high "Ah-Ha" factor (also known as "the slap on the forehead" factor). That is where something that has always seemed mysterious is finally revealed to you and you respond by either a big "Ah-Ha" and/or by slapping yourself on the forehead! I found both of these to be frequent responses when working with Bruce's material. When something mysterious is revealed and you feel as though you finally "get it," it is always very enjoyable.

In the review of Volume One I laid out what was presented in that volume, so I will not rehash that. I'll just say that Volume Two builds on the knowledge gained in Level One and does so by applying it directly to the guitar fretboard. It is a very good idea to have gained a grasp of the Volume One material before moving on to Volume Two.

Bruce begins Volume Two by reviewing the C major scale and the C chord voicings as they lay out on the guitar. In doing this he also presents the concept of chord inversions and shows how they lay out on the fretboard for the C chord. As stated in the last review, there is way too much information presented here in each section for me to cover in a short review. Suffice to say that the details that he provides in each section give a thorough presentation.

After presenting the section on C chord voicings, tones, and inversions, Bruce gives you some valuable homework. You have to figure out the concepts that he has just presented for the C chord for the other C-A-G-E-D chords. He provides some examples and then gives you worksheets. It is a valuable exercise and really helps bring these concepts home.

After you've done the worksheets, and thus grasped the basic chord concepts, Bruce steps out into new territory on these chords. He introduces and explains more about each of the various C-A-G-E-D chords, covering details about how the Root, 3 & 5th notes are arranged in various chord voicings. He also adds some things about their relationships with each other and discusses concepts such as "power chords." He also presents an extensive, and understandable, section on moveable chord forms. All of his presentations are accompanied by heavy use of fretboard graphics, which aid greatly in the learning process.

Thus far all of the chord work has been restricted to a study of the Major Triad (Root-3rd-5th) for the "five major" chord forms (C-A-G-E-D). The next section covers the "complex" chord forms (adding the 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 7th scale tones). Bruce provides sufficient explanation (without getting too deep) and then provides some more worksheets so that you can again gain some practical familiarity with these concepts.

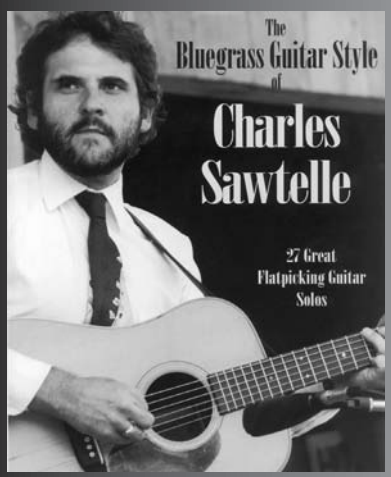
Bruce finishes up the first half of the book by going back to the five major chord shapes (C-A-G-E-D) and demonstrating how they can be moved around the fretboard, where the root of each chord form is located, how the shapes relate to each other and the Major Triad notes, and various other relationships all heavily illustrated and aimed at gaining you more familiarity with these chord shapes and how they are used up and down the fretboard (this section is very similar to the exercise in John Carlini's column in this issue—the triad notes are presented on the fretboard and you work to find as many chord shapes as you can). Bruce finishes this section with a discuss of the capo and how to use it.

In the second half of the book Bruce moves on from chords to scale shapes and box patterns. Once again his presentation is thorough and the heavy use of diagrams and tabs make it easy and practical. Here you will work closely with your guitar by going through various scale shape exercises and patterns, first in various positions and then all over the neck. Once the various scale shapes are learned in different keys, Bruce provides a valuable section on how to move from one scale shape to another (i.e. from an A-shape to a G-shape, E-shape to a D-shape, etc.). This concept is presented in various keys as well.

The remainder of this book moves on to concepts that the bluegrass or folk musician may not be interested in because they are more applicable in the realm of jazz. But it is good information to know. This section of the book starts with a presentation of Major chord variants: Minor Chords. Dominant 7th Chords, Minor 7th Chords, 6th chords, etc. This section is followed by a section covering Walking Chord Progressions. This is a very valuable section for anyone interested in playing Western swing style rhythm. Bass lines, passing chords, and passing tones are addressed in this section.

In the final section of the book Bruce deals with "quadrads" of the diatonic scale. A complex looking word, but if you think about it, you already know about triads (3-note chords), the term quadrads simply refers to 4-note chords—specifically adding the 7th scale degree to the 1-3-5 of the triad. After a lengthy discussion and presentation of quadrad chord families, which include some practice chord changes and progressions which employ these chords, Bruce then covers the topics of diminished chords, augmented chords, minor and major 7th chords, and chord extensions (9ths, 11ths, and 13ths). This is followed by a very interesting and useful segment on how to match chords to a melody.

There is A LOT to this book and this series. I have learned a great deal from going through it and I look forward to learning more as I go through the books a couple more times.



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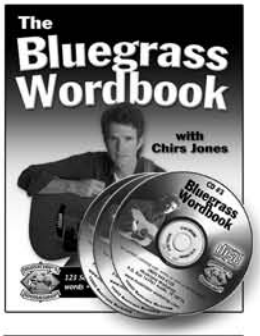

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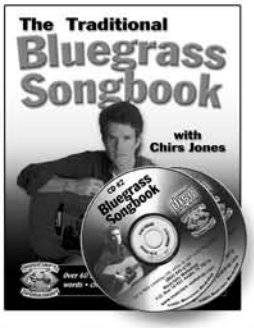

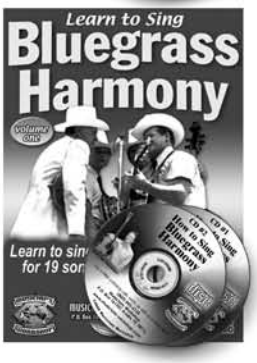

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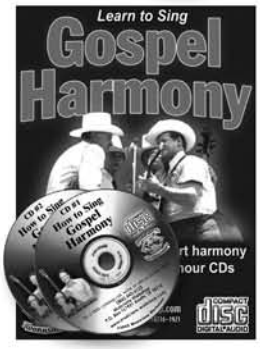

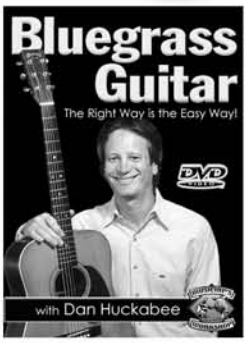

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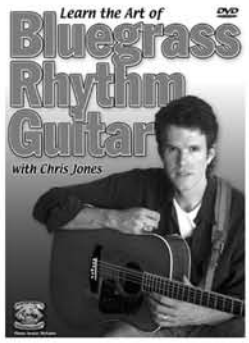

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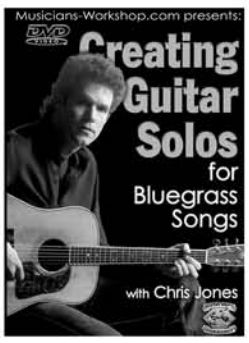

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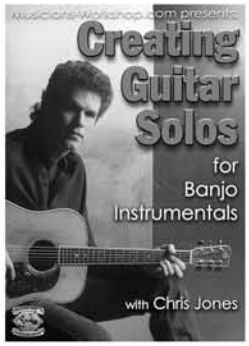

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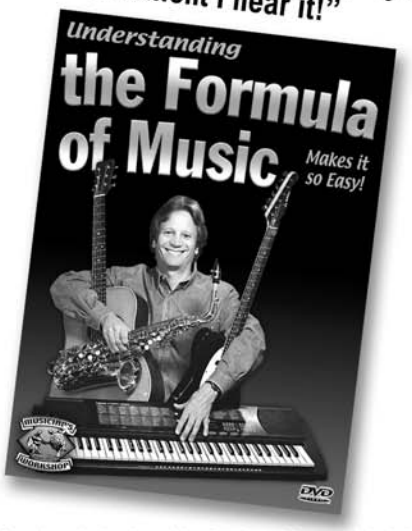

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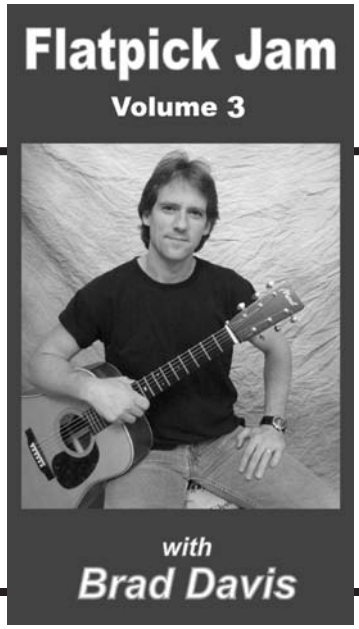

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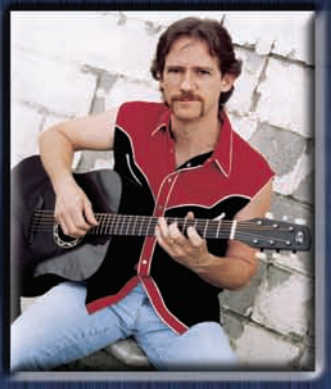

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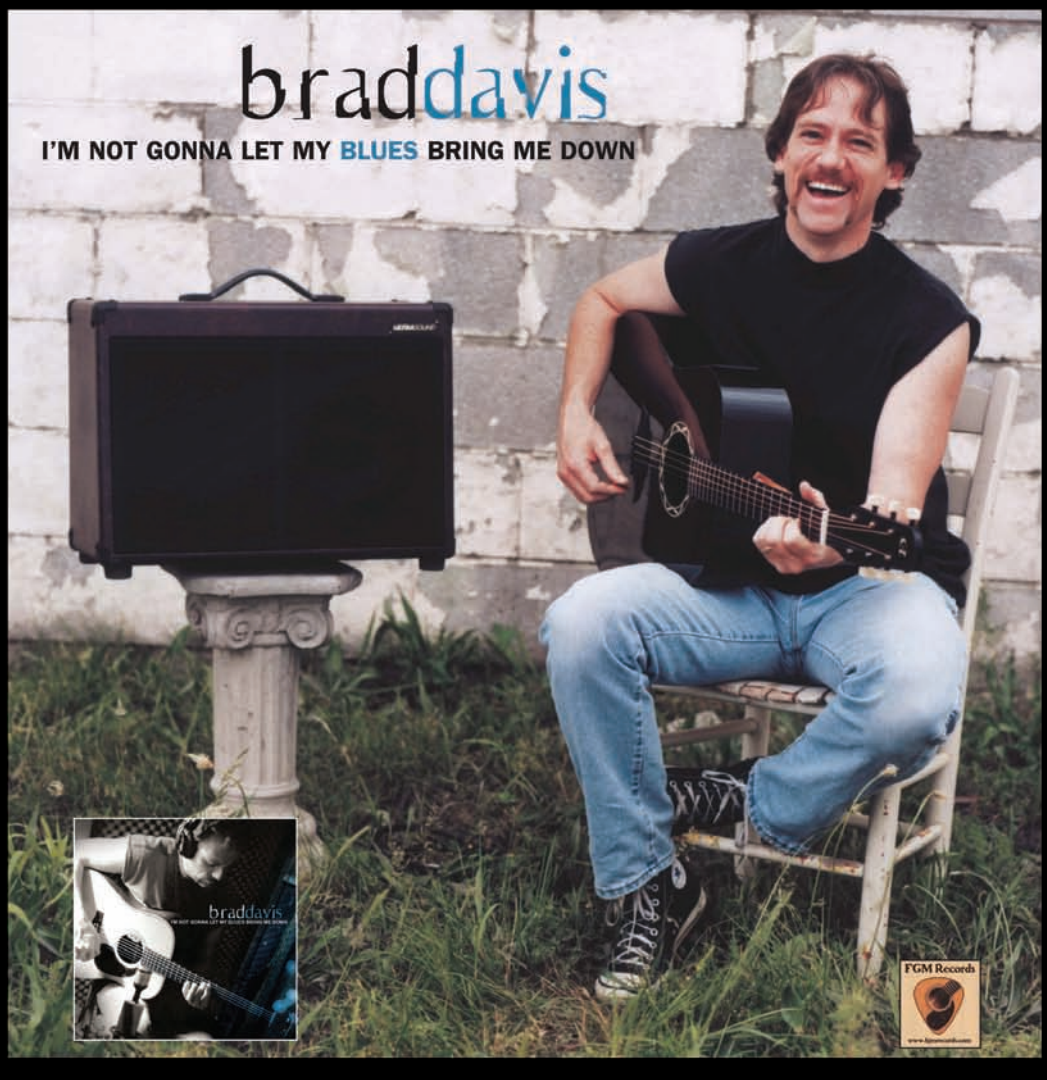

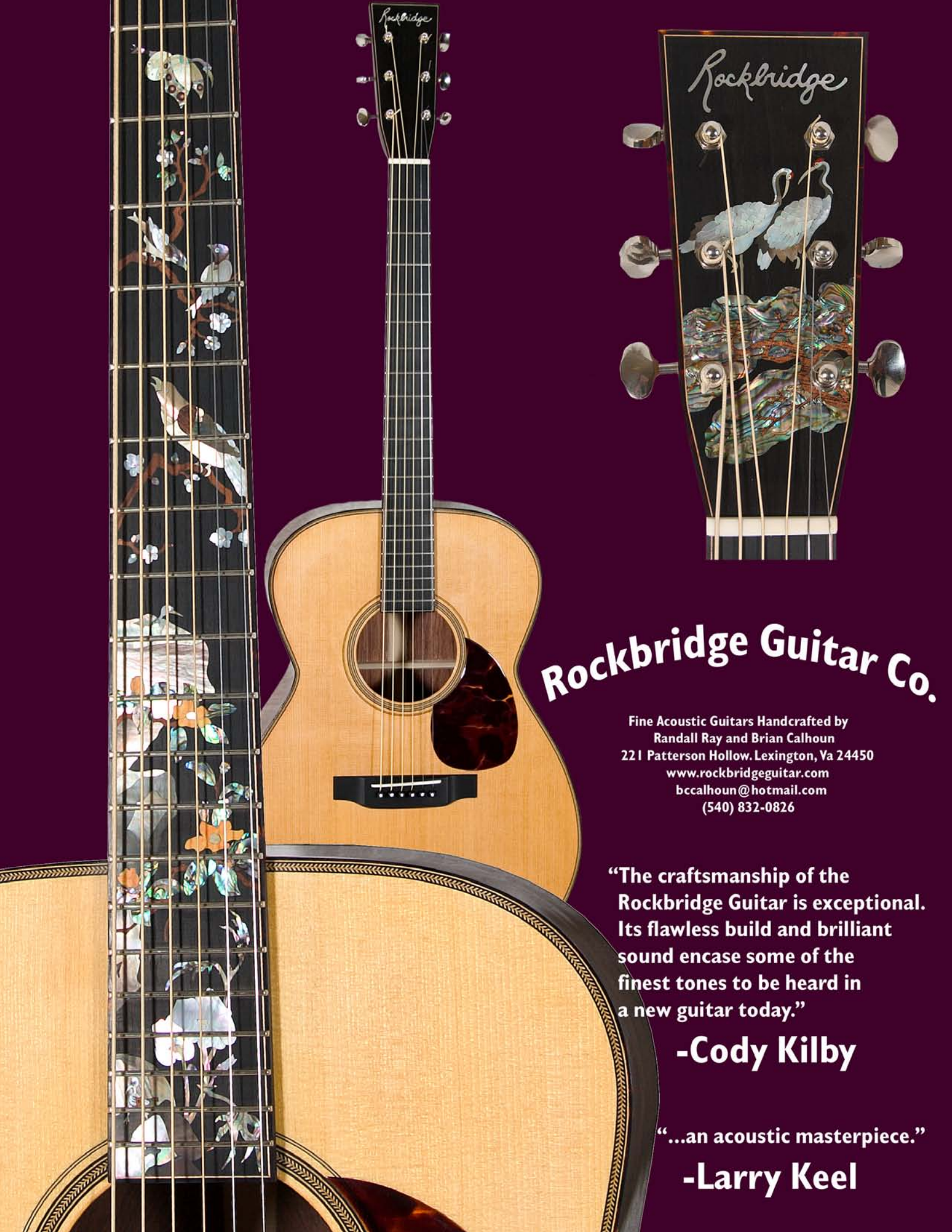

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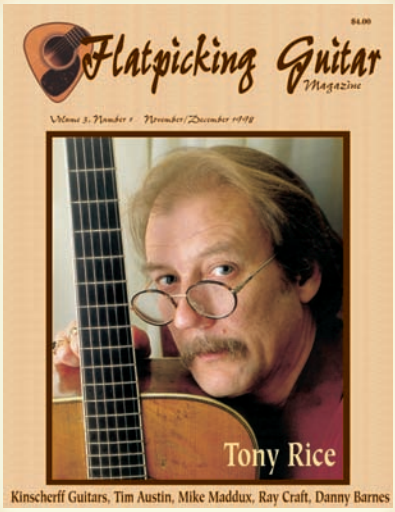

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Bucks County Folk Music Shop
New Britain, PA 18901
Phone: 215-345-0616

Celestial Mtn. Music
Brevard, NC 28712
Phone: 828-884-3575

Custom Fretted Instruments
Sparta, TN 38583
Phone: 931-657-2398

Janet Davis Music
Bentonville, AR 72712
Phone: 479-855-0700

Davis & Sons Guitar Shop
Camden, SC 29020
Phone: 803-713-1000

Discount Music LLC
Chamblee, GA 30341
Phone: 770-457-3400

Fireside Music
Memphis, TN 38125
Phone: 901-507-6535

Fretted Instruments
Birmingham, AL 35409
Phone: 205-879-6489

Minor Chord
Acton, MA 01720
Phone: 978-264-0299

The Music Barn, Inc.
Greensboro, NC 27403
Phone: 336-272-2118

Music Folk
Webster Groves, MO 63119
Phone: 314-961-2838

My Favorite Guitars
Naples, FL 34112
Phone: 239-530-7425

Scales Street Music
Reidsville, NC 27320
Phone: 336-349-3000

T. G. Music
Goshen, IN 46526
Phone: 219-534-1243

Vic's Guitar Cave
Forest Grove, OR 97116
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Gallagher Guitars
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– recorded live on a 000 model in front of a national TV audience, 1992.

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